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Shades of Violence: Aggression and Domination in Indian Culture. Part I. Vedic Studies

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Shades of Violence
Aggression and Domination in Indian Culture

0. General Introduction[1]

The present volume of Cracow Indological Studies comes out as yet another fruitful product of a long-standing collaboration between several researchers, a collaboration which has ultimately developed into a close-knit league of five Indological centres based at the universities of Cagliari, Kraków, Milan, Prague and Warsaw. For years,

[1] This introductory essay is the result of cooperation of its three authors within the frames of the project *Violence: Aggression and Domination in Indian Culture* supported by grant from the Priority Research Area (Heritage) under the Strategic Programme Excellence Initiative at Jagiellonian University. Hermina Cielas Leão is responsible for § 2, Tiziana Pontillo for § 1 and Lidia Sudyka for § 0.

we have met regularly to discuss topics that we consider relevant for present-day Indology, also inviting to our colloquies colleagues from centres all over the world. These meetings have resulted in formation of yet smaller teams with the aim of undertaking specific research tasks, each team undertaking their own scientific projects which again resulted in numerous publications. Thanks to the Strategic Programme Excellence Initiative at the Jagiellonian University (EI.JU) and a generous grant obtained in the area of heritage research, it was possible to set up a group that is now exploring the subject of violence in Indian culture.[2]

For many reasons, defining violence is not an easy task, that too, despite existence of numerous, relevant entries in various dictionaries. There are different types of violence, and different degrees of violence directed against different members of society as well as the nature around us. Violence is also a cultural matter. Moreover, what some call violence, others describe as a necessary self-defence. As Inga Clendinnen (2005: 190) has rightly said: "Every society is adept at looking past its own forms of violence, and reserving its outrage for the violence of others." Let us also add to this statement a clarification that certain social strata or classes are keen to attribute an innate proclivity for acts of aggression to those situated lower on the social ladder than them. In an 8th century CE treatise on poetics authored by

[2] The members of this international research group, established thanks to grant project obtained in June 2022, are: Initiators: Lidia Sudyka (Jagiellonian University; coordinator), Ewa Dębicka-Borek (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland), Elena Mucciarelli (University of Groningen, Netherlands), David Pierdominici Leão (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland), Tiziana Pontillo (University of Cagliari, Italy); Other members: Monika Browarczyk (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland), Hermina Cielas Leão (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland), Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdzowicz (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland), Edeltraud Harzer (University of Texas at Austin, USA), Martin Hříbek (Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic), Frank Köhler (University of Tübingen, Germany), Cinzia Pieruccini (University of Milan, Italy), Weronika Rokicka (University of Warsaw, Poland), Paola M. Rossi (University of Milan, Italy) and Aleksandra Turek (University of Warsaw, Poland).

Vāmana, we find the following example of violence being attributed to a specific group through a use of a simile:

> *caṇḍālair iva yuṣmābhiḥ sāhasaṃ paramaṃ kṛtaṃ* |[3]
>
> This worst act of aggression has been performed by you, [just] as if you were *caṇḍāla*s.

The above example may be found among the six deficiencies of comparison that are better avoided. In this case deficiency refers to an object of comparison which is defective (*nyūna*) with respect to birth (i.e., caste affinity).[4] We do not know if Vāmana had created this example himself or if he was quoting from an earlier source. Nevertheless, the appearance of such a comparison in the treatise *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛtti* is significant.

When one talks about Indian civilization, often the remarkable ethical principle—the idea of non-violence or *ahiṁsā*—is taken as the hallmark of that culture. However, this does not mean that we should abstain from discussing patterns of violence also present in this very culture and well documented in its literature and art. Violence and the principle of non-violence are, in fact, two sides of the same coin.

All papers collected in this and the subsequent volumes of *Cracow Indological Studies* approach the complex issue of violence in Indian culture from a variety of perspectives adopted by the respective authors. Aggressivity, or violence in general, is a feature unavoidably connected to the exercise of royal power and the broadly understood institution of kingship. Naturally, the king articulates his rights to dominance also in his relationship with nature. Suffice to mention here the practice of hunting and its involvement in the sphere of rituals, including the religious. As far as religious rituals are concerned,

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[3] Vāmana's auto-commentary to VKĀ 4.2.9.

[4] More about the six deficiencies of comparison in: Candotti, Pontillo, Sudyka (forthcoming) § 2.6.

their violent features became obfuscated with time, which eventually led to performing sacrifices without resorting to violence, by way of finding substitutes for the sacrificial victims.

There can be no doubt that Indian art, too, recorded scenes of violence that were present in the ritual sphere and community life.

Violence has always meant effectiveness in the preservation of certain order such as the existing social divisions and the status quo desired by those in power. While consideration of various shades of violence and its phenomena, documented in sources pertaining to the early history of the Indian subcontinent, will be the focus of the current volume, the same will be followed, in the next volumes, by reflections on the contemporary Indian society as portrayed in modern Indian literature.

The whole project touches upon important elements of cultural heritage seen both from the local, Indian perspective and a broader, universal one. The growing violence and aggressive behaviour are a global problem nowadays. Its shape in India needs to be considered in the context of historical processes that built up cultural heritage and were recorded over many centuries in literary, artistic, religious and philosophical traditions. This entails an extensive, interdisciplinary research. The project is directed towards seeing certain phenomena as culturally embedded, having a pan-Indian scope and shaping the identity of the inhabitants of the subcontinent. References and links with the past, accompanied by an understanding and remembrance of those facts need to be preserved in today's rapidly changing world. To understand these connections more adequately, the research will employ the prism of modern humanities understood as combining achievements of many disciplines.

Introduction to Part I. Vedic Studies[5]

1. The present volume is devoted to the most ancient literary sources which document history of violence among the speakers of Indo-Aryan languages. Everyone is aware that the *Ṛgveda* hymns are populated by human and divine warriors, exemplary heroes and dreaded demons interfering with life on earth; neither are these protagonists or their deeds absent in both the (*Śaunaka* and *Paippalāda*) *Atharvaveda*--recensions or the Yajurveda Saṃhitās and the Brāhmaṇas. In the later tradition, accounts of fighting, displays of weaponry or strategies of warfare often take place on a mythical level in the intriguing exegetical digressions used to explain the increasing number of extravagant details that characterise the late Vedic ritual performances.

To the most disenchanted reader, it may sometimes seem that in such a gloomy milieu, nothing—not even the most desired and fascinating things in the universe, such as light, life, love—can happen without a bloodshed. Just to give an example: How many times is Vṛtra's murder mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*? Indra's epithet as his killer (*vṛtra-han-*) occurs an astonishing seventy-seven times. And yet, this is the renowned and pivotal cosmogonic enterprise from which life in the highest echelons of the divine sphere triumphantly descends. On the same line, it is truly frightening how much "hatred" flows, for instance, in the *Śaunaka Atharvaveda*. Those who would venture to search this text in the Digital Corpus of Sanskrit for some good examples of the usages of the verb *dviṣ-* "to hate," would perhaps unexpectedly come across no less than one hundred and seventy-three instances of its inflected form. However, this text, which is famous for being imbued with black and white magic, also ranges gracefully into everyday facts and ritual, ascetic, medical, political, and even soteriological speculations.

[5] The volume on Vedic studies edited by Hermina Cielas Leão and Tiziana Pontillo contains the papers discussed during the International Conference in Kraków, 27–29 October 2022, as well as other contributions on this subject.

Indeed, in the most ancient sources, even within a ritual perspective, we know how much violence was exerted by human beings on the non-human world in the sacrificial arena, especially to the harm of animals, although almost suddenly this practice seems to have disappeared and even been openly opposed. In fact, several scholars (see e.g., Heesterman 1984; 2003) have long stressed a dramatic change in the history of sacrifice from a violent, agonistic and unpredictable framework, connected with the semi-nomadic Sabhā-culture (see e.g., Vassilkov 2012; 2015), to a more and more controlled and regulated context related to a new sedentary culture, i.e., the outcome of the so-called Brāhmanical reform.

On the same line of reconstruction of the past, it has also been demonstrated that the earliest occurrences of the term *ahiṃsā*, such as TS 5.6.6.1; 5.7.6.1; AB 1.30, actually depicted the magico-ritual purpose of preventing any possible injury involving any and every dangerous being, *de facto* in order to safeguard the human beings themselves against any retaliation expected from the victim's congeners (see e.g., Schmidt 1968: 649; Schmidt 1997: 215; Schmithausen 2000: 256–258; Houben 2001: 280–286). Only later on, around the middle of the first millennium BCE, the term started to denote an intention of not immolating animals and thus the performance of sacrifices including animal victims was stopped.

As is well known, particularly in the sphere of the élites, and in connection with the adopted vegetarianism, this renewed sacrificial landscape shaped a new social, political, and economic balance that left less and less room for competition and meritocracy. Gradually the hierarchical superiority of the Brahmanical class was distinctly affirmed, while the exercise of power came to be assigned to the warrior class. In this rigid chessboard of party games that mainstream culture created, there was a studied banishment of all forms of violence, even at the cost of denying the past itself. This entailed, for example, a process of *damnatio memoriae* for the aggressiveness of the wandering members of the nomadic and seminomadic past society, as if that past belonged only to a group of Indo-Aryans who were cautiously marginalised, namely to the so-called Vrātyas. This attribution

was more successful since such groups preserved their traditions as epigones for a long time, in an inevitable conflict with the society organised on the basis of the new-born *varṇāśrama* system.

In such an assumed, sophisticated reworking of collective memory, which was often aimed at transforming the old lexicon into a novel one, well-tailored to the needs of the emerging new world, along the steps taken by the complex Śrauta reform programme, it is plausible to recognise another less conspicuous but much more refined side of the history of violence in ancient Indian culture.

Neither do the today's scholars wish to carry out an act of aggression against history of the past and therefore attempt to investigate their sources carefully, well trained by seminal works such as those of Bronkhorst (e.g., 2007; 2016) who provides ample evidence of the fact that not all ancient Indian institutions necessarily descended from the Brahmanical mainstream. For instance, Vrātya rituals were taken up in the classical king's legitimisation rites, appropriately deprived of the traits of concrete violence by means of a substitution mechanism, as pointed out by Heesterman in some of his excellent works from 1962 onward. The distance between groups of hard-line brotherhoods and the peaceful priests involved in Brahmanical rituals has been sharply reduced since Thite (2004: 559) had successfully demonstrated that *Vrātyastoma*s might also be performed by a married person "keeping sacred fires alight" (*āhitāgni*-), a person who wanted to be a Vrātya, in the sense of choosing to lead a Saṃnyāsin life, or even in the sense of becoming "a kind of Ur-monk."

2. The nine articles collected in the present volume of *Cracow Indological Studies* address various aspects related to the topic of violence in Indian culture and look at the presence of aggression and domination in Vedic studies from several different perspectives. The main subject of the contributions is one, but the vastness and diversity of study material show the importance of having a more focused look at the subject. They prove that violence can be understood manifoldly: as a brutal physical act, aggressive practice (sometimes directly connected to the sphere of ritual), verbal abuse, extreme competitiveness,

hostile behaviour as an expression of power, or oppression aimed at appropriating the attacked person's belongings and obtaining a starting economic position for themselves. The contributions included in this issue of *Cracow Indological Studies* examine the occurrence of the motif of violence in extended specimens of primary material which can be categorised under the broad definition of Vedic sources or sources from the comparable period (the last exemplified by Kinga Paraskiewicz's article devoted to the study of Avestan profession of faith). However, despite the variety of evidence that may be linked to a variety of historical, religious, political, ideological, and literary domains, the nine articles show a focused approach to the examined phenomenon, conveying a sense of uniformity and homogeneity regarding this multifaceted and complex issue.

The first article, a study by **Ganesh U. Thite**, focusses on the concepts of violence (*hiṃsā*) and non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) in India, from the Vedic period to modern times. The author shows how geographical, social, economic, and political changes influenced the shift from preserving ritualistic aggression and violent religious practices to the completely opposite attitude, characterised by condemning *hiṃsā* in modern day Vedic rituals. Thite examines various violent practices from a historical perspective and undertakes an investigation into the reasons underlaying the described evolution from *hiṃsā* to *ahiṃsā*, such as the influential opposition of Buddhist and Jaina thinkers towards the former. The long-lasting coexistence of violence and non-violence, as well as the Brahmanical attempts at conceptualizing aggressive religious acts as purely symbolic, do not stay unnoticed as, in a concise form, the article overviews the vicissitudes of the opposed concepts in question.

Vedic rituals, especially a particular rite called *mahāvrata* ("The Great Observance"), come to the fore in a case study by **Paola M. Rossi**. The author proposes a philologically cogent survey and etymological reconstruction of the terminology related to the words *abhigara* ("praiser") and *apagara* ("reviler") that denote the key figures of the *mahāvrata* ritual and appear to engage in a verbal duel. Through the study of data excerpted from Vedic sources, Rossi

analyses the nature of agonistic play between *abhigara* and *apagara* inherited from a pre-Brahmanical culture. The contribution offers an interesting juxtaposition of the dichotomous pair and the ritual, specifically the rite known as *sarpasattra* ("the sacrificial session of the serpents"), described, among others, in *Mahābhārata*, and a close relationship between violence, rite, and narration which thus emerges in these sources.

The competitiveness expressed in a form of verbal duels and the *Mahābhārata* study are also the axis of the article by **Diletta Falqui**, showing that confrontations between certain characters described in the Brāhmaṇa literature often reoccur in the best-known Indian epic. The author speaks about *brahmodya*s, sapiential verbal exchanges in the form of riddles, studied, for instance, by Renou (1949) and Thompson (1997), and links them with the competitiveness of the Vrātyas. As the main focus of the analysis, Falqui selects the *Aṣṭāvakrīya-Upākhyāna* (from *Mahābhārata* 3.132–134) which records an example of *brahmodya*. She enriches the study with relevant references to the Upaniṣadic literature, and offers convincing evidence to prove that certain types of verbal duels described in *Aṣṭāvakrīya-Upākhyāna* seem to reflect the Vrātya background and, therefore, can contribute to a better understanding of the Vrātya community in a specific socio-cultural context.

Debates involving Vrātyas are also the main subject of a contribution by **Chiara Neri** and **Tiziana Pontillo**. More specifically, the authors discuss violent debates in the Indo-Aryan culture and the role of Vrātyas in them. Starting from the analysis of the excerpts from the *Vājasaneyisaṃhitā* that records the earliest occurrence of the name *vrātya*, Neri and Pontillo meticulously study sources that refer to the violent character of the described group and investigate how the Brahmanical propaganda contributed to stigmatisation and marginalisation of Vrātyas in the mainstream culture. On the basis of an insightful parallel between the pattern of the Vrātya dialogues on one hand and the Vedic *brahmodya*s and the Buddhist Theravāda verbal exchanges on the other, the study—which also includes a detailed analysis of a particular image of head shattering that reoccurs in all

these texts—assumes that the aggressiveness of this institution was "an inherited common trait of the Indo-Aryan culture."

In an attempt to enrich even further the scholarship on the fascinating topic of the Vrātya culture and identity explored in the papers of Falqui, and Neri and Pontillo, **Anita M. Borghero** analyses a number of passages from Vedic texts that speak of the character and symbolism of the bow carried by the Vrātya leader. The author tries to provide an answer to the question as to what extend could the bow attribute be perceived as evidence of Vrātyas' aggressiveness which is frequently noted as one of the main traits of the group. Based on a scrupulous analysis of the textual material, Borghero argues that the idea of a violent nature of the Vrātyas should not be strengthened by the warlike associations linked with the bow, since the weapon could merely refer to the nonviolent, pacific form of Rudra, one of the central deities of Vrātyas, as noted in studies by Charpentier (1911), Hauer (1927), Falk (1986), and Edholm (2017).

The investigations into the Vrātya culture in the present volume are also represented by an article by **Valentina Ferrero** who takes a closer look at the lexemes *vrātya* and *vrātīna*. A detailed and systematic analysis of the given words shows that traditional grammar can appear useful in the exegesis of Vedic texts and help to solve non-linguistic problems; in this case, Ferrero uses grammatical texts to study the onset of the idea of violence linked to the Vrātya identity. The author conducts her research on the derivation of the two mentioned lexemes through the study of relevant passages from the most canonical work on Sanskrit grammar, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini, and the most representative commentaries, including *Mahābhāṣya*, *Kāśikāvṛttī*, and *Siddhāntakaumudī*. She ultimately shows how in the very name of Vrātyas one can find a strong suggestion to view them as a violent group associated with aggressive behaviour.

In contrast to the previous contributions that focus on particular case studies with references to a variety of sources, the next article, a short essay by **Edeltraud Harzer**, offers a stimulating and wide-ranging overview of violent tendencies and acts documented in the pre-Classical Vedic and Sanskrit texts. The author presents several

examples of ancient India's social and religious practices characterised by violent behavioural traits. By way of textual sources, Harzer recalls the instances of sacrificial killing of animals that young graduates of Vedic education took part in, possibly at the risk of their lives, and the fate of widows forced to face novel, inimical social framework and consequences of disadvantageous interpretations of events independent of them. The essay shows how certain acts in the domain of religious and social life of ancient Indians represent examples of violent behaviours, devoid of compassion and sensitivity.

The next contribution is devoted to the study of practices even more ruthless and drastic; **Kyoko Amano** traces the possible references to human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *Veda*s. Although the topic is already the subject of an ongoing discourse by the academic community, this study is an absolute first in the area of Vedic studies, since the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* of the *Black Yajurveda* is still little studied. Through examining newly discovered descriptions from this text, which she carefully translates and convincingly interprets, Amano demonstrates how the purification of the sacrificer before the *soma* ritual (*dīkṣā*) becomes an arena for human sacrifice and the consumption of a victim's flesh. This study thus proves that the description offered by *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* has no parallels in *Kāṭhaka Saṁhitā* or *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* that contain references to the same subject and, therefore, represents an important source for the ongoing investigation of the topic of human sacrifice and cannibalism in ancient India.

In the final article of the present volume, **Kinga Paraskiewicz** takes the reader on the journey to a different religious and cultural milieu than the one offered in the previous papers. The author analyses a particular case of verbal aggression present in Avestan profession of faith, conventionally known as *Fravarānē*, dating back to the earliest times of Zoroastrianism. The statement of belief in question, unlike similar examples of prayers from the biggest world religions, begins with a curse, an insult directed at the foes of Zoroastrians, the *daēvas* or ancient Iranian demons. In a systematic study conducted on meticulously analysed original texts and their translations, Paraskiewicz shows how verbal aggression in the Zoroastrian profession of faith is

a devout religious act and not an example of hate speech directed at an innocent victim.

The variety and complexity of topics undertaken by the authors who contributed to the compilation of the present issue of *Cracow Indological Studies* shows beyond doubt that the subject of violence and aggression is a fertile ground for the study of a field often marginalised and omitted in the discourse, namely violence and its manifestations. The nine articles collected here are the first of the series that prove relevance of such a study to the larger field of humanities, but, as we shall see in the forthcoming volumes of the journal, our work does not end here and the motif of violence and its further investigation are of great importance in broadening the field of the Indo-Iranian studies.

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Ritual
Violence and Non-violence

ABSTRACT: Current paper looks at the vicissitudes of thought on violence and non-violence in India, from Vedic period to the present. The early Vedic people lived a nomadic life and practiced customary animal sacrifice. Gradually, however, they started using euphemisms in connection with ritualistic violence and switched subsequently to non-violent rituals. Possibly, because there was a lot of opposition to ritualistic violence, mainly from the Buddhist and the Jaina thinkers, even the later Hinduism ultimately accepted the principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). Although at present most followers of Vedic rituals do not practice violence when performing Vedic rituals, some others still partly accept it and act accordingly. Also, there is some ritualistic violence outside the Vedic ritual, but there is definitely a change in outlook.

KEYWORDS: *Weltanschauung*, ritual, violence, *ṛṣi*, *muni*, euphemism, doctrine of *ahiṃsā*, violent and non-violent idol worship, black magic

Before entering into details on the subject, it would be proper to understand the geographical conditions in which Vedic people must have lived and their general *Weltanschauung* which must have been formulated by these very conditions. Of course there is a kind of vicious circle here. We have to resort to guesswork regarding the geographical

conditions on the basis of the *Weltanschauung* and guess about the *Weltanschauung* on the basis of geographical conditions. Since no one, including the archaeologists, has any definite and decisive evidence about the *Urheimat* and about the date(s) of Vedic people and their literature, I, too, am putting before the readers my views while keeping in mind my limitations and uncertainty on the matter of violence and non-violence in India in the field of ritual.

Thus, it seems that Vedic people must have lived in a region of extreme temperatures where there were hot summers, very cold winters, and little rain. So, they were forced to be nomadic, without any definite, stable territory to call their own. Naturally, they must not have been able to cultivate land and had to depend more on hunting than on agriculture. They were constantly attacking other people or being attacked by other people. Their motto was "live or die." There were many tribes among them and they must have been fighting with each other as is evident from the references to *dāśarājña*, "the fight with ten kings," a war described in the *Ṛgveda*. Because of the cold weather, preservation of fire was their primary concern and Fire-worship was a part of their religion. Moreover, animal sacrifice was an essential feature of their daily life and their religious beliefs. In short, the Vedic people were prone to violence on account of their land's geographical conditions, and their worldview and their religion were subsequently grounded in violence. Naturally, a war-hero and demon-killer Indra was their highest god at the time of battles, and Varuṇa, a ruthless punisher-god was their god at the time of peace. Agni, Fire god, was also very important for them because he was the mystic protector of their domestic life. Appropriately, he was called Gṛhapati, "the master of the house."

However, when Vedic people settled in the Saptasindhu region,[1] they found more suitable conditions for a kind of steady/sedentary life: ample water-supply, fertile land, and comparatively favourable geographical environment for permanent settlements, regular life, and agricultural

[1] The term *saptasindhu* or "seven rivers" refers to a number of rivers that were mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* (see, for example, ṚV I.35.8) and are located in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, from Gandhāra to Kurukṣetra. See, for example, Sontakke and Kashikar 1933–1951.

prosperity. These changes brought a lot of development in the details of their rituals. The more they moved towards the east, the more they could develop/evolve their thinking about compassion, non-violence, and love. While earlier their main aim was worldly happiness and the highest worldly pleasure was symbolised by the idea of heaven, now, they wanted something more than immediate pleasure, and that aspiration was embodied in the concept of salvation, i.e., *mokṣa* or release from worldly existence. It is significant to note that the non-violent ways of thinking (like those associated with Buddhism and Jainism) originated in the Gangetic regions. The later Hinduism adopted the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) from these two ways of thinking.[2]

There were two types of intellectual leaders among the Vedic people and they represented two types of Vedic thought: based respectively on violence and non-violence. The thinkers belonging to the first group were called *ṛṣi*s and the thinkers belonging to the second were called *muni*s. While the *ṛṣi*s used to be married men, *muni*s were celibates or those who voluntarily renounced the world and became monks. In Yāska's *Nirukta*, a treatise on the semantic exegesis of a collection of Vedic words including hundreds para-etymologies, the word *ṛṣi* is derived from the root *dṛś-* "to see" (II.11 *ṛṣir darśanāt*), and thus, traditionally, this word denotes "a seer."[3] It is, however, better to derive the word *ṛṣi* from the root *ṛṣ-*, "to rush," and thus, it may be taken in the sense of "the one who rushes forward," i.e. "a leader," or "an intellectual leader." The word *muni*, however, is rather difficult to derive. I propose my own etymology of this word. In my understanding, this word has some connection with the Dravidian word *muṇ* which means "the front." So, ultimately, the word *muni* could denote "someone in front," "a leader," or "an intellectual leader." *Ṛṣi*s were the performers of Vedic rituals seeking ultimate pleasure and trying to reach heaven through the performance of sacrifices. They were non-vegetarians, used to killing animals, at times even taking part in

[2] For historical perspective on this choice of the "non-violence" culture, see, e.g., Schmidt 1968; Heesterman 1984; Bodewitz 1999; Schmithausen 2000.

[3] See Bhadkamkar and Bhadkamkar 1985.

the battles through ritual performances and invocations of the deities, and thus, they were persons not averse to violence. On the other hand, *muni*s practiced silence (*mauna*), observed fasts, performed penance and self-restraint, thus trying to follow the doctrine of *yoga*, and ultimately achieve freedom from birth and death, called *mokṣa*, "liberation." Vedic priests such as Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, etc., are traditionally called *ṛṣi*s; the sages like Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, Patañjali, Nārada, Durvāsas, Buddha, Mahāvīra, etc., are well-known as *muni*s. It is noteworthy that traditionally Patañjali is associated with grammar, medicine and *yoga*. Vyāsa and Vālmīki are also called *muni*s.

While the early Vedic sages were violent men killing animals (including cows and bulls), in the Brāhmaṇa texts the attitude towards animal-slaughter and towards violence in general appears to be ambivalent. In the smallest *soma* sacrifice (*somayajña* or *sōmayāga*) minimum three animal sacrifices take place. A he-goat is sacrificed on the day called *upavasatha*, immediately preceding the day of the proper *soma* sacrifice (technically called *sutyā*); one animal sacrifice takes place on the *sutyā* day, and one at the end of the sacrificial period. In each of the first two animal sacrifices one he-goat is killed but in the last one it is supposed to be a cow. However, in the Brāhmaṇa period, this last animal sacrifice was optional and because of the growing attitude against killing of cows (or bulls), it had become obsolete. Nevertheless, there is the possibility of at least two he-goats being killed in the course of each *somayajña*.

In the Brāhmaṇa texts, in the fragments dealing with the details of animal sacrifice, we find that there is an euphemistic sophistication of violence. It is possible that some of the ritualists might have perceived the act of killing to be rather troublesome to their sensitive minds. We already know that *puruṣamedha*, the human sacrifice, was only meant to be symbolic and the actual act of killing men in the ritualistic manner was banned by the ritual texts (see, for instance, *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* XIII.6.2.12–13, cp. *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* III.9.8.3).[4] In fact,

[4] For *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* see Weber 1964. See also Dumont 1948 and Houben 1999; 2001. For *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* see *s.e.* 1999.

the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* became very important in Buddhism, Jainism, and later Hinduism. It has its roots in the descriptions of animal sacrifices in the Brāhmaṇa texts. Thus, water is sprinkled on the animal in order to pacify whatever is "cruel" in the act of killing it (see ŚB III.8.2.8ff). The Brāhmaṇa texts also try to convey that the animal is not going to "death" but rather to the "sacrifice" (ŚB II.81.10). In later period, the Mīmāṃsā exponents also advocate a theory according to which the violence in the Vedic ritual is no violence at all (see, for instance, *yajñiyā hiṃsā hiṃsā na bhavati*, a famous saying from the oral tradition).[5] This is a kind of practical compromise because the Mīmāṃsakas do not deny the authority of the *Veda*s, prescribing ritual violence on one hand, while also trying to accommodate the changing forces of Hinduism and treating *ahiṃsā* as the most essential principle of religion, on the other.

Further, we see that the officiating priests do not even want to see the actual process of animal-killing; at the crucial moment, they step back to the altar from the place of the sacrifice and sit down, turning their faces to the *āhavanīya* fire. "Lest we should not be the eyewitnesses of the act of animal being killed" (ŚB III.8.1.15: *nedasya saṃjapyamānasya adhyakṣā asāma*), they say. When the animal is dead, it is declared so with the performative utterance *saṃjñaptaḥ paśuḥ*, "the animal is sacrificed," and the priests who have avoided the act of seeing the deed may now proceed to do further actions in the ritual.

Even in connection with the use of words, there is some euphemism employed by the authors who refer to the matters of Vedic sacrifices. Thus, the Brāhmaṇa texts prescribe that one should not use words which directly denote the act of killing, but rather some mild alternatives or indirect expressions. The imperative forms of verbs which mean "slay!" (*jahi*) or "kill!" (*māraya*) should not be used, "for it is a human way of expression." One should rather say "make [the animal] known [to the gods]" (*saṃjñapaya*), or "it has gone near the gods" (*anvagan*). Efforts are made to ritualistically put life in the animal. When the animal is being killed, some oblations are offered with the

[5] See, for example, Abhyankar and Jośī 1971–1980.

formulae from *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* XIII.18 and thereby, mystically, the life is put in the animal (ŚB III.7.4.4). It is also said that the animal which is killed for the gods becomes immortal (cf. ŚB III.8.3.26).[6]

In this way, we find a kind of transition in the case of Brāhmaṇa literature regarding animal sacrifice: even though the violence was impossible to avoid, the efforts to incorporate the non-violence are also visible. It is important to note that from the mediaeval period onwards the tendency to perform animal sacrifice in a symbolical manner started to be increasingly popular. This way of performance was introduced mainly by such followers of the Vedic religion who did not like to go against the *Veda*s but still did not like any type of violence in the ritual. They came up with some substitutes for the animal sacrifice, like making an "animal" out of rice flour dough and offering it instead of a living being. Some others used to offer clarified butter instead of animal body parts. There are, however, some others who are very strong supporters of animal sacrifice in the literal sense. Indeed, the priests and performers of Vedic rituals, even though very limited in number (the total number will not go beyond two hundred approximately) are divided into two classes: those who perform proper animal sacrifices (they use the term *prayakṣapaśu* to refer to the sacrificial animals) and those who perform the sacrifice in a symbolic manner (they use the terms *piṣṭa-paśu*, "flour-animal" or *ghṛta-paśu*, "clarified-butter-animal" to denote the objects of sacrifice). As only natural, both groups dislike and criticize each other, even though otherwise they are the followers of the same religious practices and doctrines, full vegetarians and of similar nature in other respects as well. Most of them are economically backward; politically, socially, and physically weak; and marginalized in every respect. But their religious convictions are strong and they follow them zealously. When the artificial, substitute "animal" is "killed," those who are of the opinion that the animal should be killed literally shout in the manner, as if they have conquered and killed their enemy. Some of these people claim that for them the animal sacrifice is a source of mystic experience.

[6] See, for example, Weber 1972.

Such an opinion is especially common in Andhra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. In Maharashtra, however, on account of a spiritual leader named Gajanan Maharaj from Akkalkot, some of his followers started performing Vedic rituals devoid of killing the animals. Also elsewhere, in regions like Kerala, Vedic sacrifices are sometimes performed without ritual violence. In 1975, the famous Atirātra performance at Pāññāḷ was decided to be performed without the act of actual animal sacrifice because the possible opposition from the public was taken into consideration. However, during this event, at the time of preparing the fire altar, a tortoise was immured alive. Very few persons among the spectators, Indians as well as non-Indians, noticed it. This was an act of a very silent violence, hardly opposed by anybody. A tortoise (*kūrma*) does not produce any sound. It is also considered to be a brick (*iṣṭakā*) in the mystic sense. The fact that a tortoise was chosen to be "silently" sacrificed in Pāññāḷ confirms the famous Sanskrit saying: *devo durbalaghātakaḥ*, "thus god kills a weak animal." This being so, nobody performs sacrifice using animals such as tigers, lions, and similar beast but offers meeker he-goats or like animals, else weak birds, often not even able to fly.

There is a waterfall in the Goa region of India. Naturally, in rainy season, there is a lot of water in the area. A train passes through that region extremely close to the waterfall. Once, I travelled by train on this route. Unnoticed by anyone, a man threw forcefully a cock into that waterfall. This was a kind of animal sacrifice, a part of a votive rite. In this way, many birds and other animals are offered all over the world, either as a part of religious rituals or just for the sake of consumption by human beings. It is indeed impossible to count the numerous acts of both religious and secular violence that occur on daily basis. The efforts on behalf of non-violence are, by comparison, very few. Still, no one has been able to stop such acts (to mention only the rich literature written on or against war) and no one has been successful in preventing wars or war violence.

There are numerous temples in India, particularly devoted to various forms of Durgā, Kālī, or to some local minor deities to which he-goats or birds are offered. At times, in places like Guwahati, male

buffaloes are also killed. In the so-called Tantric rituals meat, liquor, etc. are a part of religious rites. Among gods some are believed to be vegetarians. And to them, no animals are offered. God Viṣṇu and his various forms like Kṛṣṇa and Jagannātha are famous for their non-violent nature. Narasiṃha, being a form of Viṣṇu, is treated as non-violent in Maharashtra, but in some other parts of India, he is as cruel as a lion and assaults and hunts animals. God Gaṇeśa with his head of an elephant is also a non-violent god. There is a temple of this god in Maharashtra famed in a following story: Once, a devotee offered some non-vegetarian food to Gaṇeśa but the god turned away his face. Therefore, now we only see there his back while in other temples we see the face of this god. As we have seen, numerous gods in different temples of India are associated with various traditions regarding violence and non-violence.

In *Bhagavadgītā*, the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* is highly praised. The text divides qualities into two classes: good and bad. They are called *daivī sampat* and *āsurī sampat* respectively, that is, "divine wealth" and "demonic wealth." The doctrine of non-violence is included in *daivī sampat* (XVI.2). The people belonging to the latter category, namely possessed of "demonic wealth," always think about killing their enemy (XVI.14). It is, however, important to note that in the fourth chapter of *Bhagavadgītā* (IV.8), the god Kṛṣṇa says:

> *paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtāṃ* |
> *dharmasaṃsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge* ||
>
> For the protection of good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the establishment of the Religion, I take birth from age to age.

Thus, even violence is at times necessary, like for the sake of protecting religion. Ultimately it is the purpose that justifies whether violence may be accepted as good or bad.

There is one more form of ritual violence worth mentioning. It is not an actual violence but rather an imaginary one, known as "black magic." In Sanskrit, it is called *abhicāra*. The word *abhicāra* literally

means "(ritualistic) attack." The word is derived from the root *abhicar* which means "to attack." Of course it is only a ritualistic attack on the enemy, either in order to kill him or cause harm to him, physically, financially, or through any other way. In Vedic ritual, there are detailed descriptions of *abhicāra* which is present almost at every step in the performance of Vedic rituals. It is to be noted that it is a weak person who performs such type of rituals with a hope to be able to harm the enemy. *Abhicāra* rites include throwing some offerings into the fire, utterance of words meaning harm to the enemy, and so on. Thus, *śāpa* or "curse," "abuse," is also a part of oral violence, even if ineffective in reality. The Mīmāṃsakas offer a lot of discussion on *abhicāra*. On the one hand, because the Mimāṃsakas are strong advocates of the *Veda* in general, they cannot deny that Vedic texts have prescribed black-magical rites. On the other hand, in modern times they have also accepted the doctrine of non-violence in principle. Therefore, they cannot accept this violence although it is merely notional. The text called *Arthasaṅgraha* includes non-violence even in the definition of *dharma* or "religion."[7] Thus, the definition of *dharma* according to this text, *codanālkṣaṇo 'rtho dharmaḥ*, denotes that something beneficial, prescribed by the *Veda*, is *dharma*. In this way, what is non-beneficial, i.e., consisting of violence, cannot be defined as *dharma*. Since it has been prescribed by the *Veda* it has to be called *dharma* but because it consists of violence, it is difficult to accept as *dharma*. The Mīmāṃsakas introduced a stratagem to circumvent this problem; they argue that the *Veda*s do not prescribe that one should practice black magic and kill an enemy. They simply show the way of performing black magic if one intends to perform it. The logic of Mīmāṃsakas is partially correct and applicable to the optional black magic but they do not take notice of the fact that sometimes in the Vedic ritual black magic may also be obligatory. For example, while preparing sacrificial bread, one must hold the winnowing basket

[7] *Arthasaṅgraha* is a textbook on Mīmāṃsā ascribed to Laugākṣi Bhāskara. It mentions the most important points in Mīmāṃsā-system of philosophy. See Gokhale 1932.

in the fire and utter a formula which means: "the evil being is burnt, the enemies are burnt" (VS I.7; ŚB I.1.2.2). One has to perform it no matter if there is any real enemy intended to be burnt. Such a form of black magic is prescribed by the *Veda* and one cannot avoid it; one has to accept it as a part of Vedic religion.

Finally, let us conclude with emphasis on the vicissitudes of Vedic ritual and violence. From the primitive state of nomadic life to the sedentary agricultural life there was a growing importance of non-violence in the worldview of Indian people. Although there is no complete absence of violence in their rituals, at least in theory the principle of non-violence is well-established. The changing geographical and ecological conditions have played a significant role in these vicissitudes. Non-violence as an ideal principle has its own important role to play in the social, economic, and political thoughts of Indian people in all the stages of life.

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Agonistic Scenes of the *mahāvrata* Rite
The Praiser-*abhigara* and the Reviler-*apagara*[*]

ABSTRACT: The present paper focuses on one of the competitive scenes staged during the Vedic classical *mahāvrata* rite: a sort of "agonistic" play performed between someone defined as *abhigara*, basically translated as "praiser," and someone who is called *apagara*, interpreted as "reviler." They appear to take part only in a verbal and not a physical duel. In fact, scholars consider the scene an example of a verbal contest. However, given that *abhigara* and *apagara* are never mentioned in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections and rarely occur in the Vedic *corpus*, appearing mostly in sections concerning the peculiar *mahāvrata* ceremony, this dichotomous pair certainly sparks interest since they are associable with the *Mahābhārata* context. The analysis of the Vedic textual sources concerning the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest on the *mahāvrata* day, a survey of the terminology correlated to these two terms and their etymological reconstruction may offer a peculiar perspective on the relationship between violence, ritualism and narration in the *Mahābhārata*.

KEYWORDS: *Mahābhārata*, *sattra*, Vrātya, poetry of praise, poetry of blame

[*] As far as the passages of Vedic texts are concerned, unless otherwise stated, the translation is mine.

1. Introduction: Preliminary notes on the *mahāvrata* rite

According to the scholarly literature,[1] the classical Vedic *mahāvrata* rite or "Great Observance" is an annual festival that marks the winter solstice and takes place on the last but one day of the *gavām-ayana* ritual, lit. "March of the Cows." It consists of a classical somic liturgy, that is the *agniṣṭoma* sacrifice, therefore the *mahāvrata* rite conventionally belongs to the *śrauta* ritual.[2] However, it also entails manifold non-standard ritual elements, such as musical instruments, dancing and singing women, explicit sexual references, etc., considered by scholars as tokens of a New Year festival, characterised as such by an "atmosphere of bacchanal" (i.e. Jamison 1996: 96–98). As a calendrical rite, the Vedic *mahāvrata* is a ceremony that marks the passage from the old to the new year, by means of which sunlight, life and prosperity must be renewed and re-founded.

Several antagonistic scenes, such as those performed by *ārya* vs. *śūdra*, *brahmacārin* vs. *puṃścalī* and chariot races, also feature among these peculiar ritual elements. More specifically, a verbal contest between *abhigara* and *apagara* takes place,[3] and a duel, to conquer the sun, between an *ārya* and a *śūdra* is staged.[4] Therefore, formally it is a *śrauta* rite, but the antagonistic trait is emphasised, that is to say, a sort of "ritualised" violence is performed. In this regard Heesterman[5] argued that such scenes may be remnants of primordial warrior violence, considered as an archetype of the sacrificial violence itself. The archetypical antithesis of life and death was gradually converted to a metaphorical level by means of the mediation of the priestly category and translated into the ritual dichotomy of purity and impurity, controlled by the sacerdotal authority. In this sense, the antagonistic

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1 Cf. e.g., Hillebrandt 1890; 1897: I. 157–158; Keith 1908; 1909; Hauer 1927: 246–267; Horsch 1966: 325–327; Rolland 1973; Parpola 2000; Witzel 1997b; 2005.

2 Thite 1975: 100–103.

3 Cf. Kuiper 1974, and the very stimulating paper by Reich (2010).

4 See Rossi 2022.

5 E.g., Heesterman 1985: 75 ff.; 1993: 54–55.

scenes, performed on the *mahāvrata* day, must stage the dichotomy between ritual purity and impurity: the winner of the contests is the champion of the Brahmanical orthopraxy, and the defeated rival, charged with ritual impurity, is categorically removed from the sacrificial area.[6] Although Heesterman's interpretation of such a "ritualised violence" has drawn criticism[7] since it postulates a theoretical model that is not easily verifiable, the "agonistic" trait does however clearly characterise the early Vedic culture.[8] The antagonistic social dynamics of a semi-nomadic clan-based society, like the proto-Indo-Aryan one, are aimed at the acquisition of social prestige (Kuiper 1962: 182), since its leadership is committed to securing wealth for all the community, especially by means of the ritual distribution (*vidátha*)[9] of conquered cattle and booty. A form of warrior sodality of Indo-European matrix must be entangled in this proto-Indo-Aryan society, a group that belongs to the Vrātya culture and which is correlated to a warrior brotherhood / *Männerbund*, characterised by specific initiation practices. Such practices were aimed at instructing the future Indraic *yóga*-chieftain, that is the clan-lord entrusted with leading his own clan in the mobility phase (*yóga*) of the semi-nomadic lifestyle[10] and who not only had to protect the clan-cattle but also conquer new livestock for the *vidátha*. According to some scholars the *mahāvrata* rite appears to refer to the Vrātya warrior culture,[11] and even to correspond to a sort of cosmic *vidátha* (Kuiper 1974: 131). More specifically, it celebrates the emergence of a new model of sovereignty, inaugurated by the Kuru clan-lordship (Witzel 1995: 7–8.) and, in fact, this rite is correlated to the emergence of the Kuru hegemony. The same was a sort of "dynastic chiefdom," that is a large confederation or "supra-tribal" realm, based on what Proferes (2007: 12) has defined as an "ecumenical" paradigm of sovereignty, identified with "solarship"

6 For instance, as regards the challenge for the conquering of the sun, cf. Rossi 2022.
7 Cf. i.a. Whitaker 2011 *vs*. Collins 2014.
8 Cf. e.g., Whitaker 2011: 163–166.
9 Cf. Kuiper 1974: 129–132; Thapar 1984: 55–56; Crevatin 2016 [2017]: 22–23.
10 As for this interpretation, cf. Selva 2019: 405.
11 Falk 1986: 31; 44; Kershaw 1997: 230 ff.; Selva 2019: 329 ff.

in general, which also drew on the Vrātya model of leadership.[12] And the *mahāvrata* rite was a sort of "medium" by means of which the new paradigm of the Kuru sovereignty came to be established.

On the other hand, it may also be assumed that a Brahmanical revision of both the ritual and textual material concerning the *mahāvrata* ceremony was carried out by the sacerdotal authority, especially in an anti-Vrātya perspective (Hock 2016). In fact, a festival like the *mahāvrata* might have been more effective in establishing the ecumenical value of the self-same overlordship, if it had been ritually legitimised by the sacerdotal elite. In effect, the very Kuru sovereignty promoted the *śrauta* reform itself and the institution of the sacerdotal category that was definitively entrusted with performing the sacred ceremonies.[13] The classical *mahāvrata*, as a rite depicted in the Vedic sources and included in the *śrauta* reform, is thus framed in a ritualised cosmos, which is hierarchically oriented according to micro--macro cosmic correspondences and pivoted on the fundamental homology between the sovereign and the rising-sun.[14]

2. *Abhigara* and *apagara* in *sattra* rituals

Furthermore, the *mahāvrata* ritual belongs to the *sattra* typology[15] which is a sacrificial session of twelve days or more, in which all the participants or *sattrin*s are simultaneously officiant priests and sacrificers (*yajamāna*s).[16] They are all Brahmins, but there is no real *dakṣiṇā* and thus duties and benefits are shared in a mixture of roles, as a sort of sodality, which is not completely in line with Brahmanical orthopraxy. Such a peculiarity might reflect a pre-*śrauta* liturgical reality, preceding the reconfiguration of the priestly function that was brought about by the Kuru hegemony where the then chieftains still held the double

[12] Cf. Rossi 2023.
[13] Cf. Witzel 1995.
[14] Cf. Rossi 2023.
[15] Cf. Kane 1941: 1239–1246: 1243.
[16] Cf. e.g., Falk 1985; Malamoud 2002: 94–95.

role of "warrior-lord" and "priest-lord."[17] Moreover, some scholars[18] have suggested that the *sattra* ritual might be ascribable to the Vrātya sphere since it appears to preserve a similar idea of sharing and sodality.[19] On the other hand, this very idea of Vrātya "sodality" perfectly fits into the Kuru "ecumenical" paradigm of sovereignty. Therefore, the very "agonistic scenes" of the *mahāvrata* rite might be remnants of the Vrātya milieu, particularly the warrior-novices initiation practices aimed at preparing the young male members of the clan for lordship.[20] Let us not forget that the *sattrin*s are also *dīkṣita*s, that is "the initiated." But the "agonistic scenes" are also manifestations of this new kind of Kuru over-lordship and these competitive performances allow supremacy to be symbolically conquered and promoted.

It is remarkable to note that the rare Vedic citations of the terms *abhigara* and *apagara* are correlated to the self-same *sattra* rituals: for example, they are mentioned as *dvandva abhigarāpagarau* not only in the textual sources concerning the *mahāvrata* rite, but also in the list of kings-serpents—*Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* (PB) 25.15.3—who perform a *sarpasattra*, the "sacrificial session of the serpents":[21] the role of 19 priests is carried out by 19 kings, amongst whom Ṣaṇḍa and Kuṣaṇḍa[22] are respectively the *praiser* and the *reviler* (*ṣaṇḍakuṣaṇḍāv abhigarāpagarau*). Moreover, the elliptic dual *abhigarau* is also mentioned in another priestly list, the list of the *saptahótṛs*, the "seven

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17 As regards the late-Vedic priestly specialisation, cf. Brereton 2004.

18 Falk 1986: 31, 44; Kershaw 1997: 230ff.; Selva 2019: 329ff.

19 Cf. Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 199.

20 Cf. Kershaw 1997: 342ff.; Selva 2019: 329ff.

21 The same list is found in *Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra* (BŚS) 17.18, but the compound *abhigarāpagarau* is missing. Instead, the same expression is quoted in *Lāṭyāyana-Śrautasūtra* (LŚS) 10.20.10: *ṣaṇḍakuṣaṇḍāv abhigarāpagarau*. Cf. Caland 1931: 641–642.

22 The meaning of these names is unclear; as for Ṣaṇḍa, Mayrhofer (1976: 407–408) proposes two possibilities: the former is "Baumgruppe," the latter refers to a bull, that is a breeding bull or "unkastriert," if *ṣaṇḍá* were to be correlated to *sāṇḍá*. However, a contamination with *ṣaṇḍhá* "eunuch" might also be hypothesised. In *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB) IV 2.1.4–6 Ṣaṇḍa is cited as name of an *asura*.

*hótṛ*s," referred to on the occasion of the twelve-day sacrifice of *soma*,[23] which in *Śāṅkhāyana-Śrautasūtra* (ŚŚS) 11.1.1 is defined as the model for the *sattra*s. And especially in ŚŚS 10.18.4, in a similar *hótṛ* list, the *dvandva abhigarau* is explained as *anādhṛṣyaś cāpratidhṛṣyaś ca*, that is "unassailable and irresistible." Finally, TĀ 3.5.1 quotes the syntagm *yajñasya abhigarau*, with the same elliptic dual, but in TĀ 3.6.1, *āpas* are *abhigara*, mentioned in the singular on the list of the other micro-, meso- and macro-cosmic equivalences.[24] Similarly, it only appears as a singular noun in *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā* (VS) 8.47d and ŚB 11.5.9.7, equivalent to the *anuṣṭubh* metre; the singular form *abhigara* is also cited in BŚS 2.3 to denote one of the officiants of the *soma* rite.

In most of these occurrences the terms *abhigara* and *apagara*—but especially *abhigara*—connote figures involved in ritual contexts; however, interestingly, terms belonging to the military semantic field (*anādhṛṣyaś cāpratidhṛṣyaś ca*) are employed to define them in ŚŚS 10.18.4. Furthermore, priestly functions are combined with kingship in the Vedic *sarpasattra*:[25] the kings-*sattrin*s attain immortality, like serpents which, having shed their old skin, defeat death.[26] Moreover, references to the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* context are present: the

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[23] *Kāṭhaka-Saṃhitā* (KS) 9.12; *Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā* (MS) 1.9.5 (1); *Taittirīya--Āraṇyaka* (TĀ) 3.5.1; ŚŚS 10.18.4. Cf. Heesterman 1985: 222–223. According to Weber (1868: 142) *abhigarau* would mean "two *abhigara*s." The list of the seven *hótṛ*s is already mentioned in *Ṛgveda* (ṚV) 2.1.2, but the pair *abhigara* / *apagara* is lacking; cf. also Minkowski 1992: 111ff.

[24] TĀ 3.6.1: *vāg ghótā* | *dīkṣā patnī* | *vāto 'dhvaryuḥ* | *āpo 'bhigaraḥ* | *mano haviḥ* | *tapasi juhomi* | "The word is *hótṛ*, the consecration is the sacrificer's wife, the wind is *adhvaryu*, the waters are *abhigara*, the mind is the offering: I offer in *tapas* (fire's heat / ascetism)."

[25] Cf. Minkowski 1989: 413–416. As for the Vedic *sarpasattra*, see also Minkowski 1991: 386–391.

[26] PB 25.15.4: *etena vai sarpā apa mṛtyum ajayann apa mṛtyuṃ jayanti ya etad upayanti tasmāt te hitvā jīrṇāṃ tvacam atisarpanty apa hi te mṛtyum ajayan sarpā vā ādityā ādityānām ivaiṣāṃ prakāśo bhavati ya etad upayanti* || 4 || "By means of this (rite) the serpents defeated death. They, who perform this one, defeat death. Therefore, having shed their old skin, they (serpents) creep over: in actual fact they defeated death. The Ādityas are the serpents: for those who perform this (rite), there is brightness, as if they were Ādityas."

list of the kings-snakes also includes Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Janamejaya, that is the father of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍava descendant, Parikṣit's son, respectively; the former assumes the functions of a *brahman* and the latter of an *adhvaryu*. Therefore, it is likely that the Vedic *sarpasattra* and the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* performed by Janamejaya, when the *Mahābhārata* itself is recited, are correlated in a certain way. For example, Caland (1931: 642) considers the *śrauta sarpasattra* the prototype of the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra*; Minkowski (1989: 415–416) argues that both the Vedic and the epic *sarpasattra* are the outcome of a common mythical narrative and ritual heritage related to a form of *sarpavidyā*.[27] Moreover, especially on the basis of Heesterman's theory, van den Hoek and Shrestha (1992: 62) maintain that the pattern of the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* is older than the Vedic version, even though both stemmed from a primordial form of *sarpasattra*, whose remnants are still present in the *śrauta* ritual.[28] However, the *Mahābhārata* year-long *sarpasattra* is not a rite performed by kings-serpents, but rather a holocaust of snakes and not a *sattra strictu sensu*, given that Janamejaya is clearly a *kṣatriya* who pays the *dakṣiṇā* to the Brahmin Āstīka.[29] Therefore, the relationship between Vedic and epic *sarpasattra* is not such a linear one. Finally, it is most likely that the *mahāvrata* rite might also be correlated. The latter is actually not a *sarpasattra*, but it belongs to a *sattra* such as the *gavām-ayana* and it is the framework in which single duels are performed, especially verbal contests between *abhigara* "praiser" and *apagara* "reviler." On the other hand, the cosmic contest between Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas is also "performed" as if it were embedded in a ritual event. However, whereas in the case of the *mahāvrata*-framework the embedded performance consists of acted scenes,[30] the epic

[27] Cf. also Norelius 2021.

[28] For example, the so-called *pra-sarpaṇa*, a procession of officiants and sacrifice "creeping" towards the *sadas* during the first *soma* pressing of the *agniṣṭoma*. Cf. Falk 1986: 34.

[29] Cf. Minkowski 1991: 385–387.

[30] As for the relationship between the *mahāvrata* rite and forms of dramatic performances, cf. Malamoud 1998, and von Schroeder 1908: 312–313.

sarpasattra performance features oral recitation. Nonetheless, as is well known, Jayamejaya's *sarpasattra* is not the only possible framework, but the *sattra* of Śaunaka and the *ṛṣi*s at Naimiṣa Forest must also be considered, during which the *Mahābhārata* itself was recited by the bard Sauti Ugraśravas. Therefore, the *sattra* as such is the peculiar occasion on which "agonistic" performances are staged and these can be either narrated or acted out.

3. *Abhigara* and *apagara* in the *mahāvrata* rite

Against such a background, the contest between *abhigara* "praiser" and *apagara* "reviler," as pictured in the Vedic textual *repertoire* concerning the *mahāvrata* rite, deserves particular attention. Indeed, it might be the "missing link" between classical ritualism, in which the violence was formalised by the sacrificial performance which served to assure the sovereign of his own status, and the pre-Brahmanical clan-based society culture, in which warrior activities supported the chieftainship in order to ensure the livelihood of the clan-community.

The Vedic textual sources of the *abhigara* / *apagara* verbal contest consist of Yajurvedic prose, belonging to the Kaṭha and the Taittirīya schools—KS 34.5; *Taittirīya-Saṃhitā* (TS) 7.5.9.3; *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* (TB) 1.2.6.6–7—and Sāmavedic texts, namely the *brāhmaṇa*s of the Jaiminīyas—*Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* (JB) 2.405—and Tāṇḍya or Pañcaviṃśa (PB 5.5.13) recensions. The same agonistic scene is referred to in the ancillary literature by the correlated Yajurvedic *śrautasūtra*s—*Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra* (ĀpŚS) 21.18.4; 21.19.9–10, *Kātyāyana-Śrautasūtra* (KŚS) 13.3.4–5, BŚS 16.22—and by Sāmavedic *śrautasūtra*s—LŚS 4.3.1–8; 13–15, Drāhyāyaṇa (DŚS) 11.3.1–2; 4; 6–7; 11.3.12–14.[31] It is worth underlining the fact

[31] Further references to the *mahāvrata* rite are found in the *Mānavaśrautasūtra* (7.2.7.11–12) and *Vārāhaśrautasūtra* (3.2.5.33–35). It is also mentioned in the Rigvedic *Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra*, where however it is declared that its agonistic scenes should not be performed since they are "ancient and disused": ŚŚS 17.6.2: *tad etat purāṇam utsannam na kāryam etasmin samupaklpte* | "As regards the

that the textual data appears to point to different ritual traditions: on the one hand, the Tāṇḍya / Pañcaviṃśa Sāmavedic tradition, and on the other hand, that of the Taittirīya. The former tradition spread especially in the Kurukṣetra area and also influenced the Kaṭha version.[32] It is likely that it was closer to a form of archetypical Kuru rite, even though none of the known Sāmavedic recensions is directly ascribable to the Kuru period. The latter tradition developed within the sphere of the Pañcāla realm, in the Gangā-Yamunā Doāb region, corresponding to a more brahmanised cultural phase.[33] Finally, given the peripheral collocation of the Jaiminīya school, the Samavedic Jaiminīya recension was influenced by the Taittirīya school, but since it also demonstrates a few conservative traits, it represents a peculiar case.

According to most of these textual sources the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest is correlated to another duel, that is the struggle for the possession of the sun between an *ārya* and a *śūdra*: in KS and PB the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest introduces the physical contest between an *ārya* and a *śūdra*, but it appears to be a substantially different agonistic scene.

KS 34.5

abhigarāpagarau bhavataḥ | pra vā anyas sattriṇaś śaṃsati nindaty anyo yaḥ praśaṃsati | yad evaiṣāṃ suṣṭutaṃ suśastaṃ tat sa praśaṃsati | atha yo nindati yad evaiṣāṃ duṣṣtutaṃ duśśastaṃ tat so 'pahanti | śūdrāryau carman vyāyacchete ||

There are a praiser and a reviler: one praises the participants in the sacrificial session, the other one reviles (them); he who praises (them), praises what (is) indeed their praise (as) well-recited; then, he who reviles (them), rejects what (is) indeed their blame (as) badly recited. An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest [for] a hide.

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preparation of this (whole *mahāvrata*), this ancient and disused (rite) is not to be performed." (The text is based on the edition by A. Hillebrandt 1888). Moreover, it is also mentioned in *Jaiminīyaśrautasūtravṛtti* 6.39.

32 Cf. Heesterman 1962: 23, fn. 67.

33 Cf. Witzel 1997a: 303–307.

PB 5.5.13–14

> *abhigarāpagarau bhavato nindaty enān anyaḥ prānyaḥ śaṃsati ya enān nindati pāpmānam eṣāṃ so 'pahanti yaḥ praśaṃsati yad evaiṣāṃ suṣṭutaṃ suśastaṃ tat so 'bhigṛṇāti* || 13 || *śūdrāryau carmaṇi vyāyacchete* […]. || 14 ||
>
> There are a praiser and a reviler: one reviles them [the participants in the sacrificial session], the other one praises them; he, who reviles them, rejects their evil (*pāpman*); he, who praises what (is) indeed their praise (as) well-recited, greets (them) as welcomed. An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest a hide […].

In fact, according to the Sāmavedic *śrautasūtra* textual version, such a challenge between the "praiser" (*abhigara*) and the "reviler" (*apagara*) takes place in the classical sacrificial area. The two participants are positioned at the eastern and western doors of the *sadas* respectively, where the *sattrin*s are "sitting."

LŚS 4.3.1–4 ~ DŚS 11.3.1–2; 4

> *brāhmaṇo 'bhigaraḥ pūrvasyāṃ sadaso dvāri pratyaṅmukha upaviśet* || 1 || *vṛṣalo 'pagaro 'parasyāṃ pratyaṅmukhaḥ* || 2 || *sa brūyān nārātsur ime satriṇa iti* || 3 || *arātsar ity abhigaraḥ* || 4 ||
>
> The *brāhmaṇa*, (as) praiser, should sit down at the eastern door of the *sadas*, with his face to the west. The low-born person [*vṛṣala*, comm. *śūdra*], (as) reviler, (should sit down) at the western (door of the *sadas*), with his face to the east. He should declare: "These performers of the *sattra* did not succeed." The praiser (should) declare: "(These ones) succeeded [comm. *arātsur*]."

On the contrary, the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest in the TS passage appears to come after the competition for the sun/animal hide. It is not clear whether the two scenes coincide with each other, as if the

abhigara and *apagara* were homologous to the antonymic couple *ārya-śūdra*. Actually, the terms *abhigara* and *apagara* are not mentioned: only the expression *ā́nyáḥ króśati prā́nyáḥ śaṃsati* recalls the Sāmavedic *nindaty enān anyaḥ prānyaḥ śaṃsati*, with the alternative use of the root √*kruś* instead of the root √*nind*. On the other hand, the dichotomy of purity-impurity is suggested through the root √*pū* "to purify" which is also one of the crucial terms in the somic liturgy, thus evoking a more ritualised context.

TS 7.5.9.3.7–9

> *ārdré cárman vyáyachete indriyásyávaruddhyai | ā́nyáḥ króśati prā́nyáḥ śaṃsati yá ākróśati punā́ty eváinānt | sá yáḥ praśáṃsati pūtéṣv evā́nnā́dyaṃ dadhāti |*
>
> They both contest a wet skin, to obtain strength. One reviles, the other one praises; he, who reviles, purifies these ones, indeed. He, who praises, puts the food into (these ones who are) purified, indeed.

Finally, in the later *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa* (TB 1.2.6.6–7), the two contests are combined and overlap in a singular scene: the antonymic pairs of *ārya-śūdra* and *abhigara-apagara* are definitively substituted by the new and unique pair of *brāhmaṇa-śūdra*, thus emphasising a Brahmanical orientation or a more ritualistic perspective.[34]

TB 1.2.6.6–7

> *devāsurā́ḥ sáṃyattā āsan | tá āditýe vyáyacchanta | táṃ devā́ḥ sámajayan || 6 || brāhmaṇáś ca śūdráś ca carmakarté vyáyacchete | dáivyo vái várṇo brāhmaṇáḥ | asuryàḥ śūdráḥ | imè 'rātsur imé subhūtám akrann íty anyataró brūyāt | imá udvāsīkāríṇa imé durbhūtám akrann íty anyataráḥ | yád eváiṣāṃ sukṛ́tāṃ yā́ rā́ddhiḥ | tád anyataro 'bhiśṛ́ṇāti | yád eváiṣāṃ*

[34] As for this interpretation, cf. Rossi 2022.

duṣkṛtáṃ yā́rāddhiḥ | tád anyataró 'pahanti | brāhmaṇáḥ sáṃjayati | amúm evā́dityáṃ bhrā́tṛvyasya sáṃvindante || 7 ||

The gods and the *asura*s came into conflict: they contested [for] the sun; the gods conquered it. A *brāhmaṇá* and a *śūdrá* contest [for] a piece of hide; the *brāhmaṇá* (represents) the divine rank, the *śūdrá* the *asura* rank; the former should proclaim: "These succeeded, these acted well (producing welfare [*subhūtá*])"; the latter should proclaim: "These performed the act of abandoning [*udvāsa*], these acted badly (bringing disadvantage [*durbhūtá*])." The former mingles with what is, indeed, well done [*sukṛtá*] on their behalf, that is success; the latter repels what is, indeed, badly done [*duskṛtá*] on their behalf, that is non-success.The *brāhmaṇá* wins: they indeed find that, the sun of the rival [*bhrā́tṛvya*].

Here, the antonymic expressions of the Sāmavedic tradition such as *suṣṭuta-* "praise" / *duṣṣtuta* "blame" and *suśasta-* "well-recited" / *duśśasta-* "badly recited" are changed to *subhūtám* / *durbhūtám* √*kṛ* "to act well, producing something whose nature is good / to act badly producing something whose nature is bad," and *sukṛtá* / *duṣkṛtá* "well done / badly done," thereby underlining the actual "good or bad performance" (*sukṛtá* / *duṣkṛtá*) of the ritual action more than the mere verbal performance.[35] As for the Yajurvedic *śrautasūtra*s, the same textual version is found in BŚS 16.22,[36] but in KŚS 13.3 the two contests are clearly separated: in the fourth and fifth *sūtra*s the verbal contest is synthetically portrayed as follows: *abhigarāpagarau* || *ākrośaty ekaḥ praśaṁsaty aparaḥ* || "there is a praiser and a reviler;

[35] For more on this meaning of *sukṛtá* / *duṣkṛtá*, cf. the classical interpretation by Gonda 1966: 115–143; for an excursus on this question cf. Selva 2019: 394–395.

[36] BŚS 16.22: *athaitau brāhmaṇaś ca śūdraś cārdre carmakarte vyāyacchete ime 'rātsur ime subhūtam akran | iti brāhmaṇaḥ | ima udvāsīkāriṇa ime durbhūtam akran | iti vṛṣalo brāhmaṇaḥ saṃjayati naśyati vṛṣalaḥ* || "Then, those, the *brāhmaṇa* and the *śūdra*, contest a piece of wet hide; the *brāhmaṇa* (proclaims): 'These succeeded, these acted well (producing welfare [*subhūta*])'; the low-born person (proclaims): 'These performed the act of abandoning [*udvāsa*], these acted badly, (bringing disadvantage [*durbhūta*])'. The *brāhmaṇa* wins; the low-born person [*vṛṣala*] runs away."

the one reviles, the other praises." In ĀpŚS 21.19.9–12 the two scenes are evidently overlapped in a sort of mixed version, as follows:

ĀpŚS 21.19.9–12

> *śūdrāryau carmakarte vyāyacchete ārdre śvete parimaṇḍale | antarvedi brāhmaṇo bahirvedi śūdraḥ || ākrośati śūdraḥ | praśaṃsati brāhmaṇaḥ || ime 'rātsur ime subhūtam akrann iti brāhmaṇaḥ | ima udvāsīkāriṇa ime durbhūtam akrann iti śūdraḥ || taṃ brāhmaṇaḥ saṃjityāgnīdhre carmādhyasyati ||*
>
> An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest a piece of wet, white and round shaped hide. The *brāhmaṇa* is inside the sacrificial area [*vedi*], the *śūdra* outside the sacrificial area [*vedi*]; the *śūdra* reviles [*ā-√kruś*], the *brāhmaṇa* praises; the *brāhmaṇa* (proclaims): "These succeeded, these acted well (producing welfare [*subhūta*])"; the *śūdra* (proclaims): "These ones performed the act of abandoning [*udvāsa*], these acted badly (bringing disadvantage [*durbhūta*])." After having won it, the *brāhmaṇa* throws the hide into the *āgnīdhra* shed.

Finally, the Sāmavedic version of JB 2.405 appears to follow the TS model, but the two contests are evidently overlapped, as if it were a unique duel, as can be seen below:

JB 2.405

> *āryaṃ ca varṇaṃ śaudraṃ coparyupari cātvālaṃ bastājine vyāyamayanty ārṣabhe vā carmaṇi | tayor antarvedy āryo varṇo bhavati bahirvedi śaudras | tayor āryeṇa varṇena śaudraṃ varṇaṃ jyāpayanti | devāś ca vā asurāś cāmuṣminn āditye 'spardhanta | taṃ devā asurāṇāṃ avṛñjata | tad yad āryeṇa varṇena śaudraṃ varṇaṃ jyāpayanty etam eva tad dviṣato bhrātṛvyasya vṛñjate | tayor ānyaḥ krośati prānyaś śaṃsati | ya ākrośati punāty evainān so 'tha yaḥ praśaṃsati pūteṣv evaiteṣu sa indriyaṃ vīryaṃ dadhāti |*

> They make a member of the *ārya* rank and a member of the *śūdra* rank contest a goat's hide or a bull's hide, atop the *cātvāla*. Of these two, the member of the *ārya* rank is inside the sacrificial area [*vedi*], the member of the *śūdra* rank is outside the sacrificial area [*vedi*]. Of these two, they cause the member of the *śūdra* rank to be overpowered by the member of the *ārya* rank. The gods and the *asura*s contested that sun. The gods turned it around (warding it off) from the *asura*s. Since they cause the member of the *śūdra* rank to be overpowered by the member of the *ārya* rank, they then turned around that (averting it) indeed from the hateful rival [*bhrātṛvya*]. Of these two, the former reviles [√*kruś*], the latter praises. He who reviles, purifies these ones, indeed. Then, he who praises, puts Indraic strength, (that is) male power, into these ones, (who are) indeed purified.

4. Some provisional conclusions

Such a textual survey clearly demonstrates that the development of Brahmanical ritualism was instrumental in causing the role of *abhigara* "praiser" to completely coincide with the priestly function, namely the Brahmanical one, whereas the role of *apagara* was relegated to *śūdra* or *vṛṣala*, that is a marginalised role in the ritualised cosmos which preludes the dharmic *varṇa* system. This is consistent with what already results from the overview of the rare occurances of the very terms *abhigara* / *apagara* in the textual sources, as analysed above: the term *abhigara* comes to be the equivalent of a priestly role within a ritual sacrifice. Moreover, the Brahmanical orientation tends to highlight the physical contest between one who is "well doing" inasmuch as he is performing well ritually, and hence included in the ritual cosmos, and one who is "badly doing," that is performing badly ritually: he is the cosmic enemy, the *asura* who must be removed and annihilated from the Brahmanical cosmic reality. Actually, a form of violence is "ritualised." However, the *śrauta* system relied on the aetiological myth of the conflict between *deva*s and *asura*s, and it is this very "mythical" primordial violence that legitimised the Brahmanical ritualism, and through this Brahmanical supremacy. This would mean that the so-called "ritualised violence,"

as an output of the development of Brahmanism, aims to promote the hegemony of the Brahmanical system itself: the cosmic sacrifice, aimed at re-founding the dharmic order, is based on a form of warrior "sacrifice,"[37] as narrated by the *Mahābhārata* itself. Moreover, it is in turn performed as an oral recitation during *sattra*s, which is even associable with the Vrātya context, but in the case of Janamejaya's *sarpasattra,* Janamejaya himself recognises the role of the Brahmin by paying him the *dakṣiṇā*. This act of turning warrior violence into a ritualised sacrifice by introducing a narrative performance into a ceremony which distinguishes between the officiant Brahmin and the *yajamāna kṣatriya* means ascribing the power of controlling the warrior sphere and the correlated rulership to the sacerdotal category. This is consistent with Brahmanical strategy of "revisionism" applied to the epics: the *Mahābhārata* as an organically compiled work is the eventual expression of the Brahmanical response to anti-ritualistic instances and heterodox movements,[38] and more generally to the very pre-eminence of the *kṣatriya* power, expressed in the bardic tradition. This would mean that "ritualised violence" is the outcome of a process of Brahmanical re-orientation, whereas the dynamics of power were different in the pre-Brahmanical phase, that is during the pre-Kuru period and the Kuru hegemony. As touched on above, the alternating phases of settlement (*kṣéma*) and mobility (*yóga*) in the proto-Vedic clan-based society were managed by a double leadership, personified by Varuṇa (*samrā́j* "sovereign king") and Indra (*svarā́j* "independent king") respectively:[39] the former embodies the model of chieftainship committed to preserving wealth, livestock and the wellbeing of men in the settlements, by means of the regulation of waters, probably in relation to the rainy season, while the latter represents the model of chieftainship committed to managing the seasonal movement of cattle and the correlated warrior operations. This latter form of leadership

[37] As for *Mahābhārata* and sacrifice, cf. e.g., Biardeau 1976: 203–217; Hiltebeitel 1976: 318–319; Feller 1999; and Bronkhorst 2021 for a synthesis of the question.

[38] Cf. Biardeau 2002: 96–129; 747–783; and Hiltebeitel 2005.

[39] Cf. Schlerath 1960: 132–135; Schmidt 1992.

was trained by means of the esoteric Vrātya initiation practices.[40] Moreover, the authority of the clan-lord was twofold: he was "warrior-lord" and "priest-lord," or better, the warrior function and the proto-ritual function were both attributes of lordship,[41] as the kings-priests of the Vedic *sarpasattra* itself demonstrate.

It was only the Kuru hegemony that delegated definitively the priestly function to a specialised category of *brāhmaṇa*, entrusted with performing ritual ceremonies. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the model of chieftainship also changed into the supra-tribal "ecumenical" sovereign. Therefore, Janamejaya becomes a royal *yajamāna* in the *Mahābhārata sarpasattra* and in the fourteenth book of this work, in the Mongoose Stories, he is even instructed about a form of "cruelty-free" (*ānṛśaṃsya*) or "non-violent" sacrifice.[42] However, his father, the Kuru King Parikṣit, is celebrated as a cosmic sovereign by means of the *mahāvrata* rite, as attested in the *Kuntāpa* section—*Atharvaveda* Śaunaka recension (AVŚ) 20.127–136 ≈ *Ṛgveda-khila* (ṚVKh) 5.8–22;[43] on the other hand, Janamejaya himself organises the *sarpasattra* as a holocaust of snakes, despite the support of the Brahmin Āstīka, in order to revenge his father. Here his violent attitude is emphasised, whereas the Brahmin category is pictured as entrusted with the task of putting an end to Janamejaya's violence: the Brahmin Āstīka eventually manages to persuade him to spare the snake Takṣaka. Thus, although the *mahāvrata* must originally have been an expression of Kuru sovereignty, it was later integrated into the Brahmanical system through the operation of ritualistic re-orientation, as the passages from the Taittirīya scholarly tradition appear to prove. This would mean that with time, "performing well" by means of speech and action has become an exclusive prerogative of the priestly category, which was ultimately committed to ritualism. On the contrary, "performing

40 Cf. above, fn. 20.

41 Cf. Schlerath 1995: 20–46, namely 33–34; and 1960.

42 Cf, Reich 2001. On the *Mahābhārata* as a didactic work for the *kṣatriya*s, especially with regards to the *ānṛśaṃsya* "not-cruelty," cf. Hiltebeitel 2001: 202ff., namely 212.

43 Witzel 1995.

badly" has become the trait of anyone—especially *kṣatriya*—who must be relegated to the role of sacrificer, paying the *dakṣiṇā*, or even excluded from any ritual roles, whether Vrātya or *śūdra*.

In this perspective, further in-depth textual exploration may shed light on the connection between the *mahāvrata* verbal contest, the dichotomy between "brahmanical sacrifice *vs*. warrior sacrifice," as represented ultimately in the *Mahābhārata*, and the Vedic *sarpasattra* as the mirror of a pre-ritualistic ceremony that involved clan-lords and which was again correlated to the Kuru dynasty.[44] More specifically, such an analysis requires a lexical examination of the pre-ritualistic texts, such as the Rigvedic and the Atharvavedic collections, whose redaction and "canonization" is attributable to the Kuru period.[45]

5. Implied terminology in the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest: "Speech of praise" and "speech of blame"

As regards the terminology related to the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest that takes place during the *mahāvrata* rite, special attention must be paid to phrasal expressions, such as *anyas śaṃsati nindaty any[aḥ]* and *nindati anyaḥ prānyaḥ śaṃsati* from the Sāmavedic tradition, and *ā́nyáḥ krósati prā́nyáḥ śaṃsati* that pertains to both the Yajurvedic texts and the Jaiminīya school, since these are all antonymic constructions that emphasise the antagonistic roles of *abhigara* and *apagara*. In particular, the role of the *abhigara* is correlated to the verbal forms *śaṃsati* and *pra-śaṃsati*, respectively from the root √*śaṃs* / √*śas* "to recite" (< PIE **ḱe(n)s*), and *pra-*√*śaṃs* "to proclaim."[46] Furthermore, the terms *suṣṭuta-* and *suśasta-*, are past participle derivatives of the root √*stav* / √*stu* "to praise" and again from the root √*śaṃs* / √*śas* respectively and connote the role of the *abhigara*. Inversely, the role of the *apagara* is qualified by the terms *duṣṣtuta-* and *duśśasta-*,

[44] Minkowski 1991: 396–398.
[45] Cf. Witzel 1995; 1997a: 276.
[46] Cf. Gotō 1987: 302–303.

both antonyms of *suṣṭuta-* and *suśasta* respectively and by the verbal forms *nindati* and *ā-króśati*, respectively from the root √*ned* / √*nid* "to blame, to revile" (< PIE **h*$_3$*neid*)[47] and the root √*kruś* / √*kroś* "to call aloud, to cry" (< PIE **kreu̯ḱ*),[48] also with the prefix *ā-* "to call out, to shout, to revile". Therefore, it is evident that most of the terminology concerning the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest is correlated to the roots √*śaṃs* / √*śas* "to recite" and √*stav* / √*stu* "to praise," which are crucial in both pre-Brahmanical culture and ritualism since they refer to the semantic field of "solemn speech." In fact, their derivatives such as *śastrá* and *stotrá* are technical terms from the *śrauta* ritual: the former denotes the strophic section, "recited" by the *hótṛ* priest, and the latter the melodic section "sung" by the *udgātṛ́* priest. However, the scene of the *abhigara* / *apagara* contest appears to recall a "speech of praise" that is more directly related to the proto-Vedic culture than to classical somic liturgy. In the proto-Vedic clan society, eulogistic speech is one of the most effective means to obtain social prestige and recognition of supremacy, according to the *śrávas* "glory, fame" (< √*śru* "to hear, to hear of") ideology (< PIE **kl̥eu̯es*). In compliance with the Indo-European cultural heritage,[49] "heroic status" in the proto-Vedic culture is also founded on publicly "voiced" recognition, inasmuch as it can be "heard" by means of "sonority." This was the prerogative of a category of specialists: the "laud of men/heroes" (*śáṃsa- nṛ́ṇām* /*śáṃsa- narā́m* / *narā́ṃ śáṃsa-*)[50] was proclaimed by bards-*kārú*, singers-*jaritṛ́*, praisers-*stotṛ́*, sage poets-*kaví*, through "raising a lofty/high voice" (*bṛhád* √*vad-*), during solemn occasions such as the distribution ceremony (*vidátha*) in the presence of the fire. *Kavíśastá* or "recited, proclaimed by the *kaví*" is mostly an epithet for Agni (e.g., ṚV 3.21.4c; 3.29.7b); in ṚV 3.16.4cd Agni takes place "here amid an abundance of heroes, and here in the praise of men"

[47] Cf. Gotō 1987: 202.

[48] Cf. Gotō 1987: 120; Mayrhofer 1992: 416; Werba 1997: 172.

[49] Cf. e.g., Campanile 1990; Pinault 2006; West 2007: 397–398; 406–410.

[50] This syntagm occurs in ṚV 1.173.9–10a; 2.34.6b; 3.16.4d; 6.24.2c; 9.86.42d; 10.64.3a.

(*ā́ suvī́rye* / *ā́ śáṃsa utá nṛ́ṇām*). In ṚV 6.24.1cd–2 Indra, the prototype of the warrior chieftain, is evoked as follows:

> *arcatryò maghávā nṛ́bhya ukthaír* | *dyukṣó rā́jā girā́m ákṣitotiḥ* || 1 ||
> *táturir vīró náriyo vícetāḥ* | *śrótā hávaṃ gṛṇatá urvyū́tiḥ* |
> *vásuḥ śáṃso narā́ṃ kārúdhāyāḥ* | *vājī́ stutó vidáthe dāti vā́jam* || 2 ||
>
> He is worthy to be chanted by men with solemn words as the bounteous one, the heaven-ruling king of hymns, whose help is imperishable. The surpassing hero, favorable to men, discriminating, the hearer of the singer's call, whose help is wide-ranging, the good one, the Laud of Men, who gives succor to bards, praised as the prizewinner, he gives the prize at the rite of distribution. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 806).

Similarly, the compound *nárāśáṃsa* "laud of men/heroes"—cognates of YAv. *nairiiō.saŋha-* and Myc. *Ke-sa-do-ro*—[51] is used as an epithet for the gods, especially for Agni (e.g. ṚV 3.29.11b) but Bṛhaspati as Lord of the sacred formulation is also invoked as *nárāśáṃsa* (e.g. ṚV 10.182.2a).[52] It is worth noting that the syntactic relation between the two constituents of the compound is ambiguous: either a subjective value must be implied, such as "laud produced by men," or an objective value must be presumed, such as " laud with regard to men," that is having men as its objects. Jamison[53] argues that the subjective interpretation is more suitable for the deities, who are the personification of the laud produced by men, since they are present at the solemn ceremony only inasmuch as they respond to the praises proclaimed by the men-poets. However, Durante (1976: 52) highlights that the feminine derivative *nārāśaṃsī́*—ṚV 10.85.6b = AVŚ 14.1.7b = *Atharvaveda Paippalāda* recension (AVP) 18.1.6b—as the name of *gāthā* "strophe," refers to a specific literary genre, that is the bardic eulogistic song of heroic deeds, the archetype of epic poetry.

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[51] Cf. García Ramón 1992: 245–250.

[52] Cf. e.g., Sadovski 2018a; 2018b.

[53] *Rigveda Translation Commentary ad* 2.34.6 at http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/II-1-25-23.pdf.

It therefore follows that the meaning of the compound *nárāśáṃsa* must also be "a laud for celebrating heroic men," like a *chanson de geste*, especially in an extra-Brahmanical context. In fact, the occurrence in the first verse of the *Kuntāpa* section (AVŚ 20.127.1 ~ ṚVKh 5.8.1) is to be interpreted in this perspective: it is a heroic praise sung by a *śáṃsa* specialist—maybe *nṛ́śáṃsa* himself—who will be rewarded for his performance by the patron, the Kuru King Parikṣit.[54]

> *idáṃ janā úpa śruta nárāśáṃsa stáviṣyate | ṣaṣṭíṃ sahásrā navatíṃ ca kauravá*[55] *ā́ ruśámeṣu dadmahe* || 1 ||
>
> Listen to this one, o peoples: the Laud of heroes is about to be sung. We accept sixty thousand and ninety (cows) in the presence of the descendant of Kuru, among the Ruśamas.

It is worth recalling that the *Kuntāpa* section, correlated to the *mahāvrata* ceremony, and an expression of the Kuru dynasty, is only partially integrated into Brahmanical orthopraxy and is preserved as an apocryphal Rigvedic material. Therefore, in an extra-Brahmanical sphere, that is diachronically in the pre-*śrauta* phase, *nárāśáṃsa* or *nṛ́śáṃsa* as "Laud of men/heroes" may be both a specific heroic song and the title of a category of specialists entrusted with its performance.[56] The development of Brahmanism is instrumental in causing the terms *nárāśáṃsa* and *nṛ́śáṃsa* to assume a meaning consistent with the ritual function of the priestly class.[57] And the derivative *ānṛ́śaṃsya* comes

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[54] In ṚV 9.81.5c *nṛ́śáṃsa* "Laud of men/heroes" is an epithet for Bhaga, thus alluding to the function of the "poet."

[55] Text after Jeong-Soo Kim's edition (2021).

[56] Cf. also Horsch 1966: 411–416.

[57] Cf. the role of *nárāśáṃsa* in the Āprī hymns, which even preserve traces of lineage-based ritual distinctions: van den Bosch 1985: 97–98. As for Narā-śaṃsa, a divine figure equivalent to Av. Nairiiō.saŋha, cf. e.g., Oberlies 2012: 74; 155. As regards the eulogistic value conveyed by the term *śáṃsa* especially in extra-sacerdotal milieu, cf. the comparison with the Gr. κῶμος (< PIE **ḱó(n)s-o*) as argued by Durante 1976: 53.

to denote "not-cruelty,"[58] as a new rājadharmic value presented in the fourteenth book of the *Mahābhārata*.

Moreover, it is evident that the specialists in pre-Brahmanical eulogistic performances were especially engaged in "competitive" events:[59] verbal contests (*vívāc*)[60] allowed them to compete with each other for the prizes (*vā́ja*) on behalf of the clan-lord or more generally their patron, during public distributions of wealth (*vidátha*) and probably inside particular enclosed spaces (*vṛjána*).[61] For example, in ṚV 1.178 king Indra (1a: *rā́jéndra*), who is "the conqueror with his men/heroes, champion in battles, one who hears the call of the bard begging for help" (3ab: *jétā nṛ́bhir índraḥ pṛtsú śū́raḥ | śrótā hávaṃ nā́dhamānasya kāróḥ*), "will be praised in the competition for refreshment and at the debate" (4c: *samaryá iṣá stavate vívāci*). Here the term *vívāc*, a feminine noun, is evidently a synonym of *samaryá*, "concourse of fighting people," which comes from the warrior semantic field.[62] Similarly, in ṚV 7.30.2ab, Indra is said to be the one who must be invoked at the verbal contest (*tvā hávyaṃ vívāci*), especially on the occasion of the conquering of the sun.[63] In fact Indra himself is invoked by the *vívāc*s in ṚV 6.33.2ab: as a masculine noun, *vívāc* means "contestant, disputant" in a verbal duel, which is parallel to a contest of champions (*śū́rasāti*). Therefore, Indra is both the patron of the duelling heroes and the challenging singers-poets. Finally, in

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58 The term *ānṛśaṃsya*, literally meaning "unworthy of the laud of the men," is conventionally explained as a derivative of the negative form *a-nṛśaṃsa* "without laud of men" and then "cruel" (e.g., Lath 1990: 115), which thus means that only a non-violent action may be worthy of an eulogistic speech.

59 Cf. Pinault 2006; as for the Indo-European perspective, cf. West 2007: 72ff.

60 As regards the verbal noun *vívāc* and its occurrences in the Ṛigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, cf. Kuiper 1960, namely 268ff.

61 Cf. Elizarenkova 1987; for the meaning of the term *vṛjána*, cf. Elizarenkova 2000.

62 Cf. Kuiper 1960: 271.

63 ṚV 7.30.2ab: *hávanta u tvā hávyaṃ vívāci | tanū́ṣu śū́rāḥ sū́ryasya sātaú |* "The champions invoke you who are to be invoked at the verbal contest, at (the contest) for their own persons, at the winning of the sun" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 918). This reference to the conquering of the sun is perfectly consistent with the sun-contest staged in the *mahāvrata* rite; cf. Kuiper 1960: 271.

ṚV 6.45.29 Indra is pictured as one of the challengers among the praisers-singers (*stoṭ́ṛ*) at the verbal contest (*vívāc*):

> *purūtámam purūṇā́m | stoṭ́ṝṇā́ṃ vívāci | vā́jebhir vājayatā́m* || 29 ||
>
> (You,) the first among many at the verbal contest of the many praisers-singers, who compete for the prize with their prizes. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 831).

Indra is also identified in ṚV 3.34.10c (= AVŚ 20.11.10c) with one who dispels those who are *vívāc*:[64] here, as a masculine noun, *vívāc* denotes not only the "contestant, competitor," but more specifically the "opponent, antagonist" in a word duel (Kuiper 1960: 271). In this sense, the masculine term *vívāc* is a sort of *vox media*, basically connoting competitors in verbal duels, who may either be the heroes' allies or rivals, both seeking the prize, and personified by Indra. For instance, in ṚV 10.23.5 = AVŚ 20.73.6 Indra is portrayed as follows:

> *yó vācā́ vívāco mṛdhrávācaḥ | purú sahásrāśivā jaghā́na |*
> *tát-tad íd asya paúṃsyaṃ gṛṇīmasi | pitéva yás táviṣīṃ vāvṛdhé śávaḥ* || 5 ||
>
> He who smote with his speech contestants in verbal duels, those of insulting speech, and many thousands of the hostile, this and every (other) masculine deed of his do we sing—he who, like a father (his son), has strengthened his own force and strength. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1408, slightly modified).

Therefore, in this kind of antagonistic society, competitiveness entails that all the competitors are equally worthy of praise on behalf of the singers-poets, and each champion probably has his own poets--supporters, who celebrate his heroic deeds. But on the other hand, any of the counterposed contestants who is not praised must be discredited

[64] ṚV 3.34.10c = AVŚ 20.11.10c: *bibhéda valáṃ nunudé vívācaḥ* | "He split Vala; he dispelled the opponents."

and the term *śáṃsa* itself is also a *vox media.*[65] Although the terms *suśasta* and *duśśasta* do not occur in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, the compounds *suśáṃsa* and *duḥśáṃsa* are however both present: the former denotes the "speaker of good, good to proclaim" (*suśáṃsa*), the champion of the lord / *deva* who must be the winner as such; the latter is the "speaker of ill, detractor" (*duḥśáṃsa*), that is the antagonist, champion of the anti-*deva* / rival-lord, who must be defeated as such. For example, both terms are used antonymically in ṚV 2.23.10cd which is dedicated to Bṛhaspati: the formulaic phrase *mā́ no duḥśáṃso īśata*[66] seems to hint at a magic effect:

> *mā́ no duḥśáṃso abhidipsúr īśata | prá suśáṃsā matíbhis tāriṣīmahi* || 10 ||
>
> Let not the detractor, trying to deceive, be lord of us. As speakers of good, we would advance through our thoughts. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 434, slightly modified).

The magical connotation of this dichotomous terminology is evident in AVŚ 6.6.2 ac = AVP 19.2.8, where *duḥśáṃsa* is counterposed to the *hapax suśaṃsín*, lit. meaning "provided with speakers of good," that is the antagonists. The term can denote both the champion's "speakers of good" and the champion himself who is worthy of being well proclaimed, and therefore "of good fame":[67]

> *yó naḥ soma suśaṃsíno duḥśáṃsa ādídeśati |*
> *vájreṇāsya múkhe jahi sá sáṃpiṣṭo ápāyati* || 2 ||
>
> Whoever, evil speaking, will set his sights on us, speakers of good, O Soma, smite upon his face with the mace; may he go away crushed.

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[65] Cf. Schlerath 1984.

[66] The same formulaic phrase is also mentioned in ṚV 2.23.10c; 10.25.7e; AVŚ 19.47.6 = AVP 6.20.6b, where *duḥśáṃsa* clearly denotes a hostile person.

[67] Whitney's translation (Whitney and Lanman 1905: I. 286).

The same magical value is attested in ṚV 7.94.12ab: *duḥśáṃsa* is equated to one who is provided with the power of the demons-*rakṣas*-:

> *tā́v íd duḥśáṃsam mártyaṃ*[68] | *dúrvidvāṃsaṃ rakṣasvínam* |
>
> Just you two (Indra and Agni strike) the evil-speaking mortal, the evil-knowing (mortal), provided with demonic power.

In this sense its negative value is radicalised, coming to mean the Other *par excellence*. Similarly, in ṚV1.94.9 *duḥśáṃsa* is combined with *dūḍhī́* "one of evil insight, one of evil poetic vision": in this case it is Agni who is called upon to dispel the evil speakers and those whose insight is evil (*duḥśáṃsām̐ ápa dūḍhíyo jahi*), even though st. 8b in the same hymn reads: *asmā́kaṃ śáṃso abhí astu dūḍhíyaḥ* "let our laud be against those whose insight is evil." The syntagm GEN. + *śáṃsa*- implies the meaning that the laud produced by the singers-poets in honour of Agni makes the clan-men magically able to defeat their antagonists. Therefore, the praise of Agni proclaimed by the singers-poets coincides with the laud of men / heroes. In fact, in ṚV 1.44.6 Agni is portrayed as "one who is good for the singer to laud" (*suśáṃsa-gṛṇaté*). Furthermore, the adverbial prefix *abhí* "against" marks the antagonist magically: the term *abhíśasti*, a derivative of *abhí*-√*śaṃs* "to recite against, to blame," denotes a sort of "imprecation, curse" especially in the Atharvavedic lexicon (e.g., AVŚ 3.2.1b = AVP 3.5.1b; AVŚ 7.5.3b). Similarly, it is also attested in the Rigvedic collection: for example, in st. 3bc in the same Rigvedic hymn 7.94, it occurs in the formulaic phrase[69] *mā́bhíśastaye* | *mā́ no rīradhataṃ nidé* "Do not make us subject to imprecation, nor to scorn." And in ṚV 10.104.9a and 10a respectively the terms *abhíśasti* and *suśastí* are mentioned with reference to Indra: in the former case Indra frees the waters from an *abhíśasti* "curse"; in the latter *suśastí* "provided with a 'blessing' praises" is an epithet for Indra, inasmuch as he defeats the demon

[68] The same syntagm *duḥśáṃsa- mártya*- also in ṚV 2.42.8c; 8.18.14b.
[69] Cf. ṚV 7.31.5ab here below.

"obstructer" of the waters thanks to the magical efficacy of "good speaking" (*suśastí*).

Finally, *duṣṣtuta* and *súṣṭuta* do not occur as a pair of antonyms in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, although the only *súṣṭuta* recalls the Rigvedic epithet *súṣṭuta*, frequently connoting Indra and Agni. Furthermore, in ṚV 8.6.12 = AVŚ 20.115.3 a similar dichotomous expression is referred to by means of the antithetic verbal pair of perfects *ná tuṣṭuvúḥ* / *tuṣṭuvúḥ* which, according to Jamison, might also be interpreted with a present value,[70]:

> *yé tvā́m indra ná tuṣṭuvúr* | *ṛ́ṣayo yé ca tuṣṭuvúḥ* | *máméd vardhasva súṣṭutaḥ* || 12 ||
>
> (There are those) who do not praise you, Indra, and seers who praise you, but grow strong just (by) my (praise), as one well praised. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1039).

This concise lexical survey underlines the fact that even though the dichotomous pairs *suśasta* / *duṣṣtuta* and *suṣṭuta* / *duśśasta* do not occur in the pre-Brahmanical collections, a similar lexicon does however seem to anticipate them. Especially the compounds *suśáṃsa* / *duḥśáṃsa* are an excellent example. As a pre-ritualistic dichotomous pair, they imply a singular performative act: "speaking well of someone" means granting this person new vigour and turning him into a winner, a champion; inversely, a demoniac action, that is to be annihilated, is equated to "speaking ill of others." In this way the very person who speaks well of someone will receive the goods and rewards of victory; whereas the person who speaks ill of others must himself be dispelled without any rewards, and perhaps even slain. In this kind of competitive society *śrávas* "fame" is based on the "speech of praise" and the "speech of blame."

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[70] Cf. http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/VIII.1-42-1-25-23.pdf.

The verbs *nindati* and *ā-krośati* are mentioned as antonyms of *pra-śaṃsati* in the Brahmanical sources and also occur in the pre-ritualistic collections: the root √*ned* / √*nid*, and its secondary form √*nind,* (< PIE **h*$_3$*ne*i̯*d*), is mentioned in the earlier Vedic textual layer with the meaning of "to revile, to blame, to scorn, to mock" as an antonym of the root √*stav* / √*stu* (e.g. ṚV 5.42.10–11) and a formulaic phrase is found in the Rigvedic collection: √*kṛ* someone *nidé* (e.g. ṚV 7.75.8c; 6.45.27c) "to put someone to scorn." For example, expressions such as *ná stotā́raṃ nidé karaḥ* (ṚV 3.41.6c = AVŚ 20.23.6c: "You (Indra) will not put your praiser to scorn," and *mā́ no nidé ca váktave | aryó randhīr árāvṇe* (ṚV 7.31.5ab = AVŚ 20.18.5ab: "Do not make us subject to scorn (to be) spoken or to the hostility of the stranger" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 919) appear to confirm the peculiar relationship between speaking and warrior action, highlighted above. Similarly, in ṚV 2.23.14b the role of reviling heroic deeds is attributed to the *rakṣás*es "demons," that is the radical antagonists: *yé tvā nidé dadhiré dṛṣṭávīriyam* "[the demons] who have put you, of manifest heroism, to scorn" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 434).[71] Likewise, the formulaic phrase *ninditā́ro níndyāso bhavantu* "let them who scorn become those to be scorned" occurs in ṚV 5.2.6d, and the same agent noun *ninditṛ́* "one who scorns, one who reviles" is also attested in ṚV 3.39.4a in the phrase: *nákir eṣāṃtheir ninditā́ mártyeṣu* "nobody is their reviler amongst mortals," referring to the Fathers. The same agent noun *naēstar* occurs in OAv, especially as the nom. pl. *naēstārō* in YH 35.2, as the second constituent of the very discussed expression *naēnaēstārō*, "not revilers,"[72] whose first constituent is the negative particle *naē*, from which the YAv *naēciš* 'nobody' is also derived, equivalent to the Vedic *nákis* of ṚV 3.39.4a.

Finally, a few ritualistic sources correlate the phrase *nṛśaṃsa nindita*, conventionally translated as "censured bard,"[73] with the Vrātya milieu:

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[71] Interestingly, the compound *dṛṣṭávīriya* refers to a heroic deed that is *dṛṣṭá* "seen," maybe alluding to a double performance, that is the recited/proclaimed performance to be listened to, and the acted one to be watched.

[72] As for the discussion about the interpretation, cf. Hintze 2007: 63–66.

[73] As regards this debated meaning, see Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 173ff.

for example, in the depiction of the *vrātyastoma* in PB 17.2.1 this sort of antonymic expression denotes one of the three categories of performers. The past participle of the root √*nid*, used as an epithet for *nṛśaṃsa*, here evidently a bard, a specialist in *śáṃsa*, is interpreted as a token of that pejorative value attributed to the Vrātya culture by the Brahmanical anti-Vrātya propaganda. However, as a "scorned" laud-singer, it may also refer to the same competitive context in which the bards or laud-singers challenged each other, as also alluded to in the aforementioned ṚV 3.41.6c = AVŚ 20.23.6c. For example, in ṚV 7.25.2cd, the term *śáṃsa* "praise, laud" evokes Indra and is associated with *ninitsú*, a desiderative stem of the root √*nid*, thus denoting the laud proclaimed by the adversary, which, inversely, puts the other rival to scorn:

> *āré táṃ śáṃsaṃ kṛṇuhi ninitsór | ā́ no bhara sambháraṇaṃ vásūnām* || 2 ||
>
> Put the "laud" of the one intending scorn in the distance. Bring here to us an assemblage of goods. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 913).

As far as the root √*kruś* "to call out, to shout" is concerned, it is also attested in the pre-ritualistic sources: it denotes the lower register of speech, even a non-articulated way of speaking—so to say—such as wild noises (ṚV 10.146.4d), mere shouting (ṚV 4.18.6b; 10.94.4b) that is similar to animal cries. Its derivative *kroṣṭṛ́* "the shouter" identifies a jackal (ṚV 10.28.4d; AVŚ 11.2.11d); *pari-krośá* is the name of a howler animal (ṚV 1.29.7a; AVŚ 20.74.7a); *anu-*√*kruś* means the hue and cry at horse races (ṚV 4.38.5b). Therefore, the root √*kruś* represents the sonority of Otherness as such, outside the realm of well-articulated speech. It is also worth noting that the root *ā-*√*kruś* "to revile, to shout" in JUB 3.7.5 introduces a sapiential contest, whose winner attains heaven. Similarly, in a few passages of *brāhmaṇa* prose, especially in JB 2.297, the *dīkṣita*-participants in a *sattra* ceremony on the Sarasvatī[74] are said to go "killing and shouting

[74] TS 7.2.1.3–4; AB 2.19; PB 25.10.19–21; JB 2.297. Cf. also Witzel 1984.

(*ākrośat-*)"[75] and, according to TS 7.2.1.4, in this case, too, they gain the world of heaven:

> *eṣá vái devayā́naḥ pánthās tám evā́nvā́rohanti ākróśanto yānti* |
>
> This is the path that goes to the gods; they mount upon it, indeed; they go shouting.

This is an actual *yāt-sattra*, that is "a moving sacrificial session" (PB 25.10), which is a sacrificial session that moves eastward along the Sarasvatī. It is worth noting that the *Mahābhārata* also contains traces of this peculiar *sattra*, especially in relation to the journey of the Pāṇḍavas.[76] However, the same *gavām-ayana* ritual, as a march, may correspond to this kind of *sattra* (Hiltebeitel 2001: 151). Moreover, the term *krośa* is attested in JB 2.400, as the name of one of the *parimād sāman*s employed in the very *mahavrāta* rite: in particular, the *krośa sāman* and the *anukrośa sāman* are recommended for attaining the heavenly world (*svarga loka*).[77] It is interesting to note that they correspond to ṚV 8.13.1. and 8.15.1 = *Sāmaveda* (SV) I. 381–382 respectively, both devoted to Indra, as follows:

> *índraḥ sutéṣu sómeṣu* | *krátum punīta ukthíyam* | *vidé vṛdhásya dákṣaso mahā́n hí ṣáḥ* || 8.13.1 ||
>
> When the soma juices have been pressed, Indra purifies his resolve, which is worthy of hymns. He knows his own strengthening skill, for he is great. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1054)
>
> *tám u abhí prá gāyata* | *puruhūtám puruṣṭutám* | *índraṃ gīrbhís taviṣám ā́ vivāsata* || 8.15.1 ||

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[75] JB 2.297: *ghnanta ākrośanto yanti* | *etad vai balasya rūpaṃ* | "They go killing and shouting: that is the shape of the strength."

[76] Cf. Hiltebeitel 2001: 140ff.; Austen 2008.

[77] Also, in TS 7.5.8.1; *Śāṅkhāyana-Āraṇyaka* (ŚĀ) 1.4; PB 13.5.14.

> Sing forth to him, much invoked and much praised. Seek to entice mighty Indra here with hymns, (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1058)

It is evident that in the Rigvedic context the function of purifier is attributed to Indra in relation to the *soma* liturgy, however, the focus is once again on Indra's heroic status, so that he merits praise (*puruṣṭutá*) and eulogistic hymns. Although the motif of purification is evoked, thus recalling the Jaiminīya and Taittirīya *mahāvrata* passages concerning the aforementioned *abhigara / apagara* contest (*yá ākróśati punā́ty eváinānt*), nonetheless, in ṚV 8.13.1, Indra purifies his own *krátu* "resolve to act" on his own (*punīte*), without any priestly support, thanks to a peculiar knowledge, as expressed by the Ā verbal forms *vidé*. It may therefore be assumed that the root √*kruś*, especially with the prefix *ā-*, specifically denotes a peculiar heroic status that is embodied by Indra, and which also alludes to a style of life marked by initiation (*dīkṣā*). In fact, this is the characterising trait of the *sattra* typology (Amano 2016): all the participants are *dīkṣita*s and brahmins at the same time, and their aim is the attainment of the *svarga loka*, achieved by undertaking initiation practices. Nonetheless, such "shouting" of *dīkṣita*s, producing unintelligible utterances, similar to animal noises, seems to be more pertinent to warrior behaviour rather than to the classical Brahmins.

6. The terms *abhigara* and *apagara*: "Poetry of praise" and "poetry of blame"

Such an ambiguity between warrior and priest roles is also suggested by the very terms *abhigara* and *apagara* whose etymology is controversial. They may be derivatives of the root ^{1}√*gar*^{i} "to welcome, to approve, to praise" (< PIE **g*^{w}*erH*),[78] once again well attested in the

[78] According to Burrow (1957: 135–136) two homophone roots must be distinguished: ^{1}√*gar*^{i} "to welcome, to approve" (< PIE **g*^{w}*erH*) and ^{2}√*gar*^{i}- (< PIE **garH*) "to sing, to proclaim"; however, Gotō (1987: 155) assumes that both the meanings are correlated to the single root ^{1}√*gar*^{i}.

same solemn eulogistic context of the pre-ritualistic Vedic texts. As for *abhí-*$^{1}\sqrt{gar^{i}}$, it mainly occurs in the later textual layer of the Rigvedic collection and means both "to greet someone as in a welcome" (deities, lords), by means of solemn speeches like hymns of praise (ṚV 1.42.10), and "to reward someone with generosity (*rā́dhasā*)"—for instance, the poet for his eulogistic compositions (ṚV 1.48.14; 1.54.7; 2.9.4; 10.7.2), on behalf of lords / deities. The prefix *abhí* therefore marks the antagonist who must be appeased and turned into a benevolent host / guest and indeed, phrases such as *abhi no gṛṇīhi*; *abhi no gṛṇantu* "welcome us, let them welcome us" are a common occurrence throughout the Vedic repertoire.[79] Thus, *abhí-*$^{1}\sqrt{gar^{i}}$ appears to especially connote acts of hospitality: for example, ṚV 7.38.4cd even suggests an "ecumenical" supra-tribal context: "the sovereign kings Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryaman and their allies greet (Savitar) in harmony."[80] However, the root $^{1}\sqrt{gar^{i}}$, with no prefix, also expresses the same sort of ambiguity one finds in ṚV 1.186.3, since it emphasises acts of hospitality, combined with the eulogistic function, even though the term *turváṇi* "the overpowering, winner," as an epithet for the praiser, refers to a competitive context:

> *préṣṭhaṃ vo átithiṃ gṛṇīṣe | agníṃ śastíbhis turváṇiḥ sajóṣāḥ |*
> *ásad yáthā no váruṇaḥ sukīrtír | íṣaś ca parṣad arigūrtáḥ sūríḥ* || 3 ||
>
> I will praise your guest, the dearest one, Agni, with lauds in harmony, (I) the winner, so that our good praise will be Varuṇa, and he [Agni] will deliver refreshments like a patron praised by a stranger (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 390, slightly modified].

This interpretation may be consistent with the role of *abhigara* who, it is said, *abhigṛṇāti* "greets, welcomes" in PB 5.5.13, but who at the same time is also the antagonist. Such an ambiguous meaning

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[79] E.g., ṚV 1.10.4b; 1.48.14c; AVŚ 4.12.2b; AVP 15.2.1/5; AVŚ 18.1.52a; KS.22.14b; TS 4.4.12.4b; MS 2.8.1; MS 3.16.4b; VS 2.18; ŚB 8.2.1.5/7.

[80] ṚV 7.38.4cd: *abhí samrā́jo váruṇo gṛṇanti | abhí mitrā́so aryamā́ sajóṣāḥ* ||

of "ecumenical" welcome and competitive supremacy, expressed by *abhí-*$^{1}\sqrt{gar^{i}}$, but even more so by the root $^{1}\sqrt{gar^{i}}$, is also attested in the old Iranian tradition: the agent noun *aibī.jarətar* "one who welcomes, praiser in a song," equivalent to the Vedic **abhi-jaritṛ́*,[81] derivative of the same root *aibī.gar* "to welcome, to praise in a song," occurs in the Old and Young Avestan textual tradition within the eulogistic lexicon that resembles the Old Indo-Āryan one, despite a different cultural context.[82] For example in Y 14.1 *aibī.jarətar* is also listed in the sequence of agent nouns that are the priestly functions, that is: *staotā zaotā zbātā yaštā framarətā aibijarətā* "praiser, libator, invoker, sacrificer, reciter, welcomer."[83] The same agent noun *aibī.jarətar* is used as an antonym of another agent noun, *naēstar*, in the aforementioned YH 35.2, despite its negative form *naēnaēstar* "non-reviler."[84] Several scholars consider the form *naēnaēstar* "non-reviler" a litotes, which intensifies the positive meaning of *aibī.jarətar*, so that the welcomer is not a reviler, and therefore definitively a praiser in a song.

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[81] The agent noun *jaritṛ́* is frequently mentioned in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, but without the prefix *abhí*.

[82] Cf. e.g., Skjærvø 2002.

[83] As for text and interpretation, cf. Hintze 2013: 66–69. The correspondences between Avestan and Vedic terminology are as follows: *staotā* = *stotṛ́* < $\sqrt{stav}$ / $\sqrt{stu}$ "to praise" (< PIE **steu*); *zaotā* = *hótṛ* < $\sqrt{hav}$ / $\sqrt{hu}$ "to pour" (< PIE (< PIE **ǵheu*); *zbātā* = *hótṛ* < $\sqrt{hvā}$ / $\sqrt{hū}$ "to invoke, to call" (< PIE **ǵhueh*$_2$); *yaštā* = *yáṣṭṛ* / *yaṣṭṛ́* < $\sqrt{yaj}$ "to worship, to sacrifice" (< PIE **Hieh*$_2$*ǵ*); as regards *framarətā* = *prasmartṛ́* < *pra-*$\sqrt{smar}$ / $\sqrt{smṛ}$ "to remember" (< PIE *(*s*)*mer*), it is not a really a Vedic term, since the root -$\sqrt{smar}$ / $\sqrt{smṛ}$ with the prefix *pra* is not attested in the Vedic sources.

[84] Text, translation and interpretation after Hintze 2007: 61ff.:

> *humatanąm hūxtanąm huuarštanąm*
> *iiadacā aniiadacā*
> *vərəziiamnanąmcā vāuuərəzananąmcā*
> *mahī aibī.jarətārō*
> *naēnaēstārō yaϑənā vohunąm mahī* […].
>
> Of good thought, good words, good deeds, both here and elsewhere
> Being done and having been done
> We are welcomers, not revilers of such good (things) are we […].

Although such phraseology may reflect the specific Zoroastrian dichotomy between good and evil, the terminological survey carried out here indicates a common lexicon that also conveys a common cultural heritage, which is most probably rooted in the pre-Zoroastrian phase on the one hand and in the proto-Vedic period on the other. It is a sort of "praise and blame poetry," also attested in other Indo-European cultures.[85] As far as the Vedic culture is concerned, remnants of this common poetical heritage may be associated with the Vrātya culture, which also influenced the Kuru hegemony: for example, in the Rigvedic hymn 10.61, the *bahuvrīhi* compound *gūrtávacas* "one whose speech is welcome" highlights the antagonistic relationship between Tūrvayāṇa and Cyavāna who are contenders in a verbal duel,[86] as specified in the first stanza:

> *idám itthā́ raúdraṃ gūrtávacāḥ | bráhma krátvā śácyām antár ājaú | krāṇā́ yád asya pitárā maṃhaneṣṭhā́ḥ | párṣat pakthé áhann á́ saptá hótr̥̄n* || 1 ||
>
> Here is a Rudrian formulation right to the point, (which) he whose speech is welcome (produced) with his mental force at a contest in skill, (a formulation) that, standing ready for liberality, will effectively guide across his two parents and, on the fifth [?] day, the seven Hótṛs. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1475).

Tūrvayāṇa is the winner of this duel: actually, in the second stanza he becomes *gūrtávacastama* "one whose speech is the most welcome." It is worth noting that the Rudraic motif correlated to the effective formulation, as quoted in ṚV 10.61, is amplified in st. 3cd of the same hymn by the portrayal of Tūrvayāṇa himself as a skilled archer. In fact,

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[85] Cf. Skjærvø 2002; West 2007: 27. A cognate of the root √*ned* / √*nid* "to blame, to revile" (PIE **h*$_3$*ne*i̯*d*) is Gr. ὄνειδος "abuse, blame," which also denotes a specific kind of poetry: cf. Nagy 1979: 222ff.

[86] Cf. Jamison's Rigveda Translation Commentary at http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/X.61%E2%80%9394-1-25-23.pdf.

he is denoted as *tuvinṛmṇá* "one whose manly power is strong,"[87] so that his warrior expertise is combined with a peculiar competence in "welcome speech," that is a poetry of praise. This is most consistent with the Vrātya context: warrior initiation implied an esoteric knowledge that was also focused on speech and poetical skill. Rudra himself is the personification of the preceptor of this kind of apprenticeship: in ṚV 1.43.4a he is designated as *gāthápati* "Lord of the song," and the first constituent (*gāthá*) of this epithet is correlated to the feminine term *gā́thā* "strophe," the specific metrical form of bardic compositions such as the *nárāśáṃsa.*[88] Moreover, Rudra as *sabhā́pati*—"Lord of the assembly"[89] can be associated with the ideal seat for the contests, especially the verbal ones.[90] Finally, the cryptic reference to the fifth day (*pakthé áhan*) recalls the fifth day of the twelve-day rite (*dvādaśāha*), which can also be a *sattra*. For example, in PB 13.5.11 it is said that the *cyāvana sāman* is sung, followed by the *krośa sāman*, devoted to Indra. And Tūrvayāṇa himself, as mentioned in ṚV 6.18.13, is supported and protected by Indra.

Finally, the term *apagara*, whose meaning is conventionally "reviler," refers to a function clearly expressed by the verbs *nindati* and *ā-króśati* in the Vedic textual repertoire related to the *mahāvrata* rite, as mentioned above: the *apagara* plays the antagonist role *par excellence*, that is he reviles, blames and shouts at the adversary. Therefore, it may be assumed that the term is a derivative of another homophone root of $^{1}\sqrt{gari}$ "to welcome, to praise," which is the root $^{3}\sqrt{gari}$, meaning "to raise the weapon, to throw" (< PIE $*g^{w}elh_{1}$)[91] that clearly pertains to warrior lexicon. In fact, the two Rigvedic occurrences of

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87 ṚV 10.61.3cd *ā́ yáḥ śáryābhis tuvinṛmṇó asya | áśrīṇītādíśaṃ gábhastau* || 3 || "He who, powerfully manly, with arrows in his hand, brought his aim to fulfilment" (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 1475).

88 Cf. Horsch 1966: 214–215.

89 Cf. Falk 1986: 84ff., namely 92 and 96.

90 Cf. Lelli 2023.

91 According to Hintze (2005: 256–257) $^{3}\sqrt{gar^{a}}$ would mean the raising of one's arm immediately preceding the act of striking the enemies with a weapon and it is a cognate of the Gr. βάλλω "to throw."

apa-√gar^{i} are definitely consistent with this value: ṚV 5.29.4c mentions *apajárgurāṇa* "repeatedly raising the arm with weapon,"[92] that is an Ā participle of an intensive stem, while the absolutive *apagū́rya* is found in ṚV 5.32.6d. Both occurrences refer to Indra's warrior deeds, focussing on the precise moment immediately before Indra slays his adversary. Particularly in ṚV 5.32.6d which refers to the archetypical duel between Indra and his anguiform enemy, the absolutive *apagū́rya* is very explicit:[93]

> *tiyáṃ cid itthā́ katpayáṃ śáyānam | asūriyé támasi vāvṛdhānám |*
> *táṃ cin mandānó vṛṣabháḥ sutásya | uccaír índro apagū́ryā jaghāna* || 6 ||
>
> That very one, lying just so, horribly swollen, having grown strong in the sunless darkness, just him did the bull Indra, invigorated on the pressed (*soma*), smash from above, after raising the arm with weapon against him. (Jamison and Brereton 2014a: 697, slightly modified).

According to Hintze (2005: 254), the Vedic *apa-*^{3}*√gar*^{i} "denotes an action immediately preceding a physical attack. It describes the first of the three stages by means of which someone inflicts bodily injury on another person with a weapon."[94] This would mean that the term *apagara* might refer to one who assumes an aggressive position, preparing for the enemy's assault, probably with their arm raised, ready to strike. It is worth noting that the Ā participle *apagurámāṇa* "one who raises the weapon" is mentioned in the famous *Śatarudrīya*, the catalogue of Rudra's attributes:[95] "Homage to one who both raises

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[92] As for the debated interpretation, cf. Jamison's Rigvedic Translation Commentary at http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/V-1-25-23.pdf.

[93] Hintze 2005: 252ff.

[94] The other two stages are carrying out the assault without shedding blood, expressed by the root *ni-√han*, and carrying out the assault with the shedding of blood (*lohitaṃ √ kṛ*): Hintze 2005: 256.

[95] MS 2.9.8; KS 17.13; TS 4.5.9.2; VS 16.46. As for the *Śatarudrīya*, cf. Gonda 1979.

the weapon and strikes" (*námo* '*pagurámāṇāya cābhighnaté ca*); here the pair of participles portrays the first two stages of a duel: firstly, the preparation for the assault (*apa-*$^{3}\sqrt{gar^{i}}$), and then the assault as such (*abhí-*$\sqrt{han}$). Therefore, a connection with the Vrātya context, especially with the figure of Rudra, is present once again. However, two further attestations of the root *apa-*$^{3}\sqrt{gar^{i}}$ are even more significant, that is the subj. *apagurā́tai* and the opt. *ápagureta* in TS 2.6.10.2:

> […] *kím me prajā́yāḥ* || 1 || *yò 'pagurā́tai śaténa yātayāt* | *yó nihánat sahásreṇa yātayāt* | *yó lóhitaṃ karávad vā́vataḥ praskádya pāṃsū́nt saṃgṛhṇā́t tā́vataḥ saṃvatsarā́n pitṛlokáṃ ná prá jānād íti* | *tásmād brāhmaṇā́ya nā́pagureta ná ní hanyān ná lóhitaṃ kuryāt* | […]
>
> "What is for my offspring?" "He, who will revile (him), will be punished with a hundred; he, who strikes (him), will be punished with a thousand; he, who sheds (his) blood, will not be allowed to become acquainted with the world of the Fathers for as many years as are the grains of sand which (the blood) falling upon impregnates." Therefore, one should not revile against a Brahmin, nor strike (him), nor shed (his) blood. […]

In fact, this passage clearly shows the aetiological basis of what will become the dharmic rule regarding the invulnerable position of a Brahmin: a descendent of Bṛhaspati, who is assigned a priestly role, is rewarded by the gods for his ritual services, so that no member of his own progeny will be harmed or injured without an appropriate penance. This is how Brahmanical prestige is proclaimed and evidently counterposed to violent acts. Therefore, violence is definitively attributed to other social categories and can become a particular prerogative of the warrior class, which is the direct antagonist of the priestly role. Thus, the relationship between priest and warrior functions is definitively dichotomised. This peculiar cultural change is expressed by means of the same phraseology that was used to refer to the phases that characterised the relationship between adversaries of contests in the pre-ritualistic culture, as mentioned for example in ṚV 5.32.6 with regard to Indra. But in this case neither of the two adversaries is a Brahmin.

Thus, not only is violence stigmatised and penalised, but the warrior sphere, the main instigator of such acts, is also scorned, unless these warriors are purified and justified by Brahmanical sapiential authority. Similarly, the ancient warrior culture, such as the Vrātya one, is also integrated and re-semanticised into the Brahmanical sphere. The *apagara*, once the prototype of the aggressive adversary ready to strike and embodied by Rudra and Indra, disappears at this moment and, as demonstrated above, is now only and almost exclusively mentioned as a detractor or a specialist in "poetry of blame" in the Vedic textual repertoire regarding the *mahāvrata*. The *abhigara*, a sort of "master of ceremonies," who welcomes and praises guests and hosts, comes to be equated with the priestly role: in the same textual sources concerning the *mahāvrata* rite he comes to be replaced by the *brāhmaṇa*, the non-violent ritual performer *par excellence*.

7. Conclusions

As part of the *sattra* ritual, the classical *mahāvrata* rite is the peculiar occasion which sees the staging of "agonistic" performances which are inherited from a pre-Brahmanical culture, especially the Vrātya context. They are both verbal and physical duels, but it is also reasonable to think that verbal and physical aggressivity may actually be two different stages of a single challenge. The *abhigara* / *apagara* contest is a prime example, since neither a real verbal debate nor a real fight is portrayed. Indeed, *abhigara* conveys a value that can also be associated with verbal contests, which actually stresses the eulogistic function, while *apagara* refers to the first stage in warrior fights, without introducing the other stages. In this sense an *abhigara* is a sort of "fighting poet," whose only duty on occasions of "ecumenical" hospitality is to welcome guests by uttering speeches of praise. However, a survey of the textual sources demonstrates that such a "welcome" function pertains to the later Rigvedic layer, whereas the motif of a competitive relationship between someone who speaks well of others and someone who speaks ill crosses different textual layers. Therefore, *abhigara*,

as someone skilled in *śáṃsa*, may be an epigone of an "agonistic" tradition of "poetry of praise" and "poetry of blame," attested in manifold Indo-European cultures, and especially common to the Indo-Iranian cultural stage. On the other hand, *apagara* actually seems to embody the warrior side of "speech" competitions: verbal aggression and altercations prelude physical fights.[96] Such a scenario is perfectly consistent with the Vedic practice of the sapiential challenges, so well outlined by Witzel (1987): the sapiential debate was considered a real contest between warriors, which led to the loser's head being "severed" or "shattered" and perhaps not only in a metaphorical sense.[97] Furthermore, it may be assumed that the proto-Vedic occasions of such performances—verbal disputes and fights—were the very *sattra*s, that is the pre-Brahmanical seasonal sessions, in which chieftains and clan-members celebrated the passage from the mobility phase (*yóga*) to the settlement phase (*kṣéma*), and reversely, performed the solemn distribution of booty or auspicious magical rites, to protect the warriors' deeds. Moreover, verbal disputes and physical contents must have been a requisite for the warrior initiation training that was part of the Vrātya tradition. Rudra himself personified the double ability of being able to speak well / ill of others and being skilled in fighting with a bow, as a prototype of a Vrātya warrior; similarly, Indra embodied the adult warrior, the ideal chieftain, able to win all kinds of contests, thus ensuring wealth for the clan. By the time of the cultural change inaugurated by the Kuru hegemony and the development of *śrauta* ritualism, these proto-Vedic cultural traits had been integrated into the Brahmanical system by means of an operation of cultural revision, clearly aimed at promoting the supremacy of the priestly category.

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96 Cf. West 2007: 476.

97 As Witzel has highlighted (1987), defeat in contests in the Vedic texts is frequently marked by the "loss" of the head on the part of the loser, expressed through the syntagm *mūrdhan / śiras vi-√pat* "to burst, fall off." In the Indraic myth too, the motif of the severed head is represented by Indra's victory against the demon Namuci: cf. e.g., ṚV 8.14.13; MS 4.3.4; ŚB 12.7.1.10ff. The same practice is also attested in a few episodes in the *Mahābhārata*, such as the *Śiśupālavadha*: cf. Reich 2010.

In fact, the *Mahābhārata* itself, the output of sattric traditions, demonstrates that the priestly role came to be attributed with the positive function of purifying and salvific power, whereas the polluting violence was relegated to the *kṣatriya* category, becoming its exclusive prerogative. However, in turn, the *kṣatriya* category came to need sacrificial action to legitimise its own status, and thus to justify violence. The scene of the contest between *abhigara* and *apagara* portrayed in the Vedic textual repertoire concerning the classical *mahāvrata* rite is an example of such a cultural operation: it preserves a few traces of the proto-Vedic background, but the Taittirīya version in particular seems to be ultimately congruent with the *Mahābhārata Weltanschauung*, preluding and even coinciding with the dharmic system. Therefore, the *mahāvrata* rite represents an important link between proto-Vedic cultural reality and the later Brahmanical orthopraxy which precedes the dharmic orthodoxy.

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Competitiveness in Sacred Learning
Traces of Indo-Aryan Oral Competition in the *Mahābhārata*

ABSTRACT: The current notion of the Vrātyas aggressivity seems to be mainly based on certain Vedic texts that record a biased account of their history. It is usually assumed that relevant passages refer to the aggression displayed by the Vrātyas during verbal confrontations with their opponents in order to determine the correct stance on ritual matters. However, even outside the Vrātya context, competitive hospitality and violent verbal exchanges may be found in the sapiential sphere, often in the form of riddles—the so-called *brahmodya*. Among the sections in the *Mahābhārata* that demonstrate epic traces of competitiveness in the field of sacred knowledge, this paper will primarily examine the *Aṣṭāvakrīya-Upākhyāna* (MBh 3.132–134), which features the sole *Mahābhārata* reference to the term *brahmodya*.

KEYWORDS: Vrātya, *Mahābhārata*, Aṣṭāvakra, *brahmodya*, competitiveness

1. Introduction

Opinions as to the identity of the Vrātyas have varied, especially since the emergence of scholarly debate on the subject whereby different views regarding the character of the group have been proposed. Some

scholars have focused on the secular aspects characterising the group and considered Vrātyas to be a tribe of nomadic cattle rustlers of either Indo-Aryan or non-Indo-Aryan descent (Aufrecht 1877; Hopkins 1889; and Winternitz 1925). Others, instead, foregrounded the religious aspects and viewed the Vrātyas as forerunners of the proto-Śaiva ascetics (Charpentier 1911), placing them at the same level as the *brahmacārin* (Hauer 1927). Meanwhile, some other studies have tried to demonstrate that the apparent violence linked to the Vrātyas is most probably associated with those who imitated them, possibly after the alleged second wave of the Indo-Aryan and Brahmanical culture (Falk 1986; Pontillo and Sudyka 2016). In this regard, attempts have also been made to demonstrate how violence ascribed to the Vrātyas is heavily influenced by the anti-Vrātya propaganda conveyed in Brahmanical texts (Hock 2016). On several occasions, scholars have pointed out the presence of the Indo-Aryan *substrata* in the Vrātya phenomenon in the Vedic and particularly the epic sources.

More specifically, verbal aggression is one of the forms of agonistic visitation that can be seen as a manifestation of systemic violence within the context of competitive hospitality and violent verbal interactions in the area of wisdom. This is regarded in the texts as an archetypal and intrinsic aspect of the Indo-Aryan universe and frequently associated with the Vrātyas. Indeed, some passages are believed to allude to the Vrātyas' aggression in verbal confrontations with their opponents in order to determine the correct stance on ritual matters. However, even outside the Vrātya context, there is evidence of competitive hospitality and violent verbal exchanges in the sapiential sphere, often in the form of riddles—the so-called *brahmodya* (Renou 1949, Thompson 1997), the contest ending with the head of the loser being cut off or the aggressor being cursed (Witzel 1987; Insler 1989–1990).

Several passages within the *Mahābhārata* depict competition for sacred knowledge. For example, the dispute between the *asura* Prahlāda and Sudhanvan, a brahman of Aṅgiras' race, described in section 2.61.60–79, is noteworthy since neither of them ends up being killed (Hegarty 2007). Other instances of quarrels or verbal contests related to

competition appear in dialogues throughout Books 2–5 and 12–14, such as when Yudhiṣṭhira interacts with the Yakṣa / Dharma (3.297–298), or when he is disguised as Kaṅka the Brahman during a confrontation with Virāṭa (4.6.12); also as the exchange between Vidura and Dhṛtarāṣṭra in section 5.33.89–91; and again in dialogues between Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīṣma (12.69.19–22); between King Ikṣvāku and a Brahmin (12.192.16); and finally, between Vālmīki and Yudhiṣṭhira (13.18.7). Other references include two instances of Indra attempting to gain secret knowledge—once by disguising himself as an ascetic and conversing with the *asura* Śambara (13.36), and again by quarrelling with some *ṛṣi*s (14.94.18–22). However, these references will not be considered in this paper which will exclusively concentrate on the *Aṣṭāvakrīya-Upākhyāna* (MBh 3.132–134), narrated by Lomaśa to Yudhiṣṭhira during the "Tour of the Sacred Fords" (Hiltebeitel 2005). To the best of my knowledge, this segment contains the only recorded instance of the term *brahmodya* in the *Mahābhārata*.

Different stories involving the same characters, but with different outcomes feature prominently in the Upaniṣadic narrative in the episode regarding Śvetaketu (Olivelle 1999) and in the Buddhist *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya*, which is considered a retelling of the Upaniṣadic episode (Black 2011: 138; 2017). The main difference between the Upaniṣadic and the MBh episode is that Śvetaketu and Ambaṭṭha, the young Brahmins who quarrel in the *vivāda*, are defeated, while a young Aṣṭāvakra triumphs over Bandin. In addition, the *Aṣṭāvakra Gīta*, which is considered a major work of the Advaita Vedanta philosophical school, focuses on the dialogue between Aṣṭāvakra and King Janaka (Stroud 2004: 48–49).

The Upaniṣadic Śvetaketu and the Aṣṭāvakra of the *Mahābhārata* share commonalities, indicating that the two traditions have intermingled certain elements that can also be found in Buddhist literature. More specifically, a prevailing theme is the arrogance shown by young Brahmins which, in the case of Śvetaketu, is coupled with feelings of envy (Olivelle 1999: 67; Black 2011: 137; 2017).

In particular, the passages referenced from the third book of the *Mahābhārata* appear to demonstrate how the epic text, as a Brahmanic

source, depicts sacred competition. Firstly, the paper will present two types of competition that could be viewed as part of a Vrātya background (§ 2.1). Subsequently, the onset of the conflict will be examined, including the formal proclamation of *brahmodya*, the violent fate of the victim, and the resulting reward for the victor (§ 2.2). Finally, tentative conclusions will be drawn and textual details that concern narrative indications of a wider Vedic imagery acknowledged (§ 3).

2. Competitiveness in sacred learning

The narrative context sees Lomaśa recounting the tale of Aṣṭāvakra to all the Pāṇḍavas, except for the absent Arjuna, during their pilgrimage to the *tīrtha*s (van Buitenen 1975, Hiltebeitel 2005). While still in his mother's womb, Aṣṭāvakra had criticised his father Kahoḍa's knowledge and had thus been cursed with crooked limbs and named accordingly (Feller 2012). When Kahoḍa's wife, Sujātā, was about to give birth, Kahoḍa sought patronage from King Janaka by participating in a debate but was defeated and ultimately drowned by the *sūta* Bandin. Twelve years later, Aṣṭāvakra accompanied his maternal uncle, Śvetaketu, to King Janaka's court to challenge Bandin in the *brahmodya* from which he emerged victorious (MBh 3.132–133). In conclusion, Bandin identifies himself as Varuṇa's son and asserts that the sacrifice of drowning the defeated is in line with the twelve-year sacrifice offered to his father. Aṣṭāvakra subsequently commands that Bandin be drowned. The Brahmins, including Kahoḍa, who had been defeated and drowned by Bandin, are revived and Aṣṭāvakra receives honour.

An overview of the main characters in the Upākhyāna is provided below (van Buitenen 1975: 472–473):

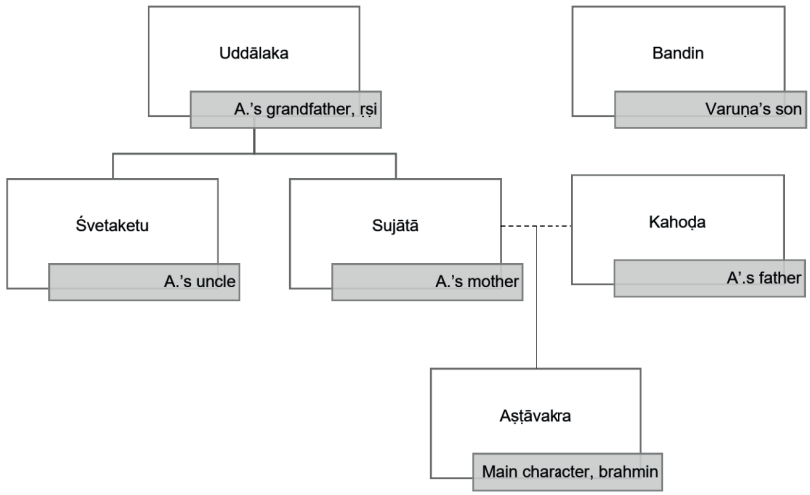

Figure 1. Overview of main characters

2.1. A comparison between two kinds of competitiveness

A close reading of the *Aṣṭāvakrīya-Upākhyāna* reveals two distinct competitive tendencies: while Kahoḍa is engaged in a competition for wealth, Aṣṭāvakra and Bandin are competing for knowledge. This dynamic seems to reflect the background of the Vrātya community (Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 199; Pontillo and Dore 2016: 10).[1]

[1] A critical analysis of the orthodox approach to the *saṃhitā* has made it possible to outline an ancient society based on the *Männerbund* (Falk 2002). An anthropological definition of the *Männerbund* comprises a group of men united by a common social status, which underpins a raid-based social economy (Falk 1986: 51–54; 2002; Jamison and Witzel 2003 [1992]: 46–47). The group elects a leader who is consecrated through special sacrifices. His duties include the equitable distribution of spoils of war among members of the community. The singular noun *vrātya*, along with *ekavrātya*, appears solely in the 15th book of the *Śaunaka Atharvaveda*, specifically in the *Vrātyakāṇḍa* (and in the 18th book of the *Paippalāda Atharvaveda*) and in the *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* 3.21. In Vedic orthodoxy, particularly in the *Brāhmaṇa*s and the *Kalpasūtra*s that address

For example, in MBh 3.132.12–13, Sujātā encourages her husband Kahoḍa to approach King Janaka and ask for wealth (*vitta-*)[2] to maintain their unborn child:

> *kathaṃ kariṣyāmy adhanā maharṣe māsaś cāyaṃ daśamo vartate me |*
> *na cāsti te vasu kiṃ cit prajātā yenāham etām āpadaṃ nistareyam ||*
> *uktas tv evaṃ bhāryayā vai kahoḍo vittasyārthe janakam athābhyagacchat |*
> *sa vai tadā vādavidā nigṛhya nimajjito bandinehāpsu vipraḥ ||*
>
> "What shall I do, bereft of wealth, O great *ṛṣi*? For the tenth month is approaching and there is no wealth from you with which I, after giving birth, can overcome this misfortune!". Then Kahoḍa, [who] had been informed by his wife [about the birth of his son], approached Janaka with the aim of obtaining wealth. After being defeated, the sage was indeed drowned in water by the speech-knower Bandin.

Two fundamental details can be gleaned from this passage: the reason for participating in the contest and its result. In fact, the Brahman contender, Kahoḍa, enters the *brahmodya* to acquire wealth (*vittasyārthe* 13b). This is in line with Desnitskaya's (2020: 156) assertion that participants in *brahmodya*s engage in verbal competitions to demonstrate the superiority of their knowledge and acquire wealth,

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it (see Pontillo 2007: 425–427; Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 155), the term *vrātya*, inflected as a plural, usually has a rather negative connotation. It reflects a non-institutionalised figure in the Indo-Aryan society. This Indo-Aryan society deviates from the established tradition in the Vedic canon. It is plausible to retrace a period where the Vrātya persona was connected to a community distinguished by the concept of a "group" and expeditions conducted by the military. However, this practice was later criticised by Brahmanic orthodoxy and referred to in the texts as a cause of contamination, to the extent that the Vrātya was identified with the outcast (Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 163; Dore and Pontillo 2016: 5,15).

[2] From a wider Vedic stance, this juncture in the story can be viewed as the earliest pivotal facet. Indeed, the textual references to Sujātā's pregnancy and her need for wealth align with the ancient Vedic progeneration myth linked to the goddess Uṣas (see Kuiper 1960: 234–236).

depending on whether they are Brahmins, sages or *kṣatriya*s. Nonetheless, the verbal contest has an adverse result: Kahoḍa is punished by drowning for having lost the contest to Bandin.

Twelve years later (*varṣe dvādaśe* MBh 3.132.16a), Aṣṭāvakra takes on the task of confronting Bandin, although his intentions are quite different from his father's. In fact, he wants to demonstrate his superiority in the field of knowledge. Aṣṭāvakra and Śvetaketu then decide to participate in verbal competition at the sacrifice hosted by King Janaka (MBh 3.132.19–20):

> *gacchāva yajñaṃ janakasya rājño bahvāścaryaḥ śrūyate tasya yajñaḥ |*
> *śroṣyāvo 'tra brāhmaṇānāṃ vivādam annaṃ cāgryaṃ tatra bhokṣyāvahe ca |*
> *vicakṣaṇatvaṃ ca bhaviṣyate nau śivaś ca saumyaś ca hi brahmaghoṣaḥ ||*
> *tau jagmatur mātulabhāgineyau yajñaṃ samṛddhaṃ janakasya rājñaḥ |*
> *aṣṭāvakraḥ pathi rājñā sametya utsāryamāṇo vākyam idaṃ jagāda ||*
>
> "Let us go to King Janaka's sacrifice, his sacrifice is said to be full of wonders. We shall listen to the debate of the Brahmins and eat excellent food. There, the status of sages will arise for us, and the murmur of prayers will be kind and friendly." Those two, the maternal uncle (i.e., Śvetaketu) and the nephew (i.e., Aṣṭāvakra) came to King Janaka's successful sacrifice. After meeting the king on the road, Aṣṭāvakra delivered this speech, challenging him with words.[3]

There are two main points to consider here, one linguistic and one cultural. Firstly, it is worth noting the use of the word *vivādam* which I have translated as "debate." The lemma is part of the technical lexicon of oral contests. According to Kuiper, *vivāda* is a later derivation of the verbal root *ví*-√*vad*- "to declare," "to announce." This root is only found in ancient Vedic texts and subsequently fell out of use. It means "a dispute, quarrel, contest," and later specifically "a contest at law, legal dispute, litigation, lawsuit" (Kuiper 1960: 273).

[3] I regard *vākyam* as an *apokoinou* of two verbal roots, *ut*-√*sṛ*- and √*gad*- respectively.

Culturally and ritually speaking, King Janaka's sacrifice is of the potlatch type. It clearly contains typical features attributed to the *sabhā*, a social institution traditionally associated with the Vrātyas (Held 1935).[4] It is said to be filled with wonders (*bahvāścarya*)[5] and Aṣṭāvakra hopes that it will bestow the status of sages on them (*vicakṣaṇatva*).[6] He displays confidence as to being granted entry to the king's sacrifice. However, he presents a challenge to King Janaka by using language unbecoming for his young age. In *adhyāya* 133, Aṣṭāvakra's superior eloquence is acknowledged, granting him access to the sacrifice where he publicly declares his intention to confront Bandin (3.133.14, 17):

> *draṣṭāsy adya vadato dvārapāla manīṣibhiḥ saha vāde vivṛddhe |*
> *utāho vāpy uccatāṃ nīcatāṃ vā tūṣṇīṃ bhūteṣv atha sarveṣu cādya ||*
> (…) *vidvān bandī vedavido nigṛhya vāde bhagnān apratiśaṅkamānaḥ |*
> *tvayā nisṛṣṭaiḥ puruṣair āptakṛdbhir jale sarvān majjayatīti naḥ śrutam ||*
>
> "Today, O Guardian of the Entrance, you are witnessing the superiority and inferiority of the one who speaks together with the sages, when the discourse was well underway, while the others are silent. (…) We have heard that Bandin the Learned, devoid of fear, having seized the knowers-of-the-Veda, defeated by him in a debate, drowns them in the water by means of trustworthy men, sent by you."

The text shows Aṣṭāvakra openly opposing Bandin, juxtaposing two contrasting patterns of competition for knowledge: a young, arrogant Brahmin versus a violent competitor.

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[4] For deeper and more recent reflections on the *Mahābhārata* as a representation of the so-called *sabhā* "society," see (Vassilkov 2015: 231; 2016: 187; Pontillo 2016: 205, af Edholm 2017: 8).

[5] Apart from this reference, the lemma occurs three other times in the *Mahābhārata*, always only in the third book and always qualifying idyllic and supernatural places (MBh 3.79.13; 3.87.6; 3.141.25).

[6] This abstract noun derived from the adjective *vicakṣaṇa* is apparently a *hapax* and only occurs here.

2.2. The *brahmodya* and the reckoning

The text then presents a technical passage in which the *brahmodya* is formally declared (MBh 3.133.18, 20, 27):

> [*aṣṭāvakra uvāca* 16]
> *sa tac chrutvā brāhmaṇānāṃ sakāśād brahmodyaṃ vai kathayitum āgato 'smi |*
> *kvāsau bandī yāvad enaṃ sametya nakṣatrāṇīva savitā nāśayāmi ||*
> (…) *vivādito 'sau na hi mādṛśair hi siṃhīkṛtas tena vadaty abhītaḥ |*
> *sametya māṃ nihataḥ śeṣyate 'dya mārge bhagnaṃ śakaṭam ivābalākṣam ||*
> (…) *rājovāca |*
> *na tvā manye mānuṣaṃ devasattvaṃ na tvaṃ bālaḥ sthaviras tvaṃ mato me |*
> *na te tulyo vidyate vākpralāpe tasmād dvāraṃ vitarāmy eṣa bandī ||*
>
> [Aṣṭāvakra said:] "Having heard this in the presence of the Brahmins, I have come to discuss the *brahmodya*. Where is this Bandin? After meeting him, I will simply wipe him out, as the sun wipes out the stars.[7] (…) He has never, in truth, entered into a debate with equals like me; in truth, transformed into a lion by such a situation, he speaks without fear. After meeting me today, he, once felled, will lie on the road like a broken chariot with a broken axle."
> (…) The King said: "I do not think that you are a man, but that you have the nature of a god; you are not a child, you are an elder, this is what I think: I do not know anyone equal to you in eloquence, so I go through the door, here is Bandin."

[7] The proposed simile (*upamā*) seems to be unique within the *Mahābhārata*. The implied common property (*sādhāraṇadharma*) between the subject (*upameya*) and the object of comparison (*upamāna*), that is the brightness of sunlight, causes the dim light of the stars to disappear (√*naś*-) as night turns into day. However, if we consider the use of the verbal root √*naś*- together with the comparative particle *iva* and the sun as the subject of comparison (*upameya*), the existing similes are different. To my knowledge, however, there seems to be only one instance where √*naś*- is used in a concept similar to the one under discussion, namely in MBh 7.138.23ab, where the army of Pāṇḍavas is likened to the blazing sun (*yathā prabhā bhāskarasyāpi naśyet*).

This excerpt reveals the only occurrence of the lemma *brahmodya* in the entire *Mahābhārata*. The formal declaration found here is in line with the Upaniṣadic style of *brahmodya*. The fervour with which Aṣṭāvakra asserts his superiority certainly qualifies him as a charismatic and positive figure.[8] At this point, King Janaka acknowledges Aṣṭāvakra's divine nature. His eloquence is unparalleled, and upon his introduction to Bandin, he is able to carry out the planned final reckoning (MBh 3.134.6):

> *lomaśa uvāca* |
> *aṣṭāvakraḥ samitau garjamāno jātakrodho bandinam āha rājan* |
> *ukte vākye cottaraṃ me bravīhi vākyasya cāpy uttaraṃ te bravīmi* ||
>
> Lomaśa said:
> "O king, Aṣṭāvakra!" Thundering in the assembly, inflamed with anger, addressed Bandin: "After I have spoken my words, give me an answer, and I will answer your words."

The *śloka* outlines the procedural stages of the *brahmodya*, where the participants take turns in posing a series of challenging riddles to each other. It is worth noting the reference to the *sabhā* context in the account of King Janaka's sacrifice as well as the use of the term *samiti* to formally address the assembly where the sacrifice takes place. Indeed, as Kuiper (1960: 240) observes, the *samiti / sabhā* is not only a preferred location for the *brahmodya*, but it can also be associated with a Vrātya context.[9]

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[8] I refer to what Desnitskaya (2020: 163) asserts about Upaniṣadic competitions: "In upanisadic competition, justification is usually not through rational argument, but through the participant's charisma and association with nondiscursive knowledge."

[9] Rossi (2015: 117) defines *sabhā* as "the space of human speech, especially in a tribal cultural context." From a literary point of view, the assembly takes on a special connotation in the context of *Śaunaka Atharvaveda* 13.4 which deals with the *brahmacārin* and the *ekavrātya* and their attainment of a higher status (I am referring to Dore's contribution in Pontillo, T. et al. 2015: 56–57). See Mucciarelli 2015 for further reflections on Vrātya poetry.

In fact, a sequence of riddles is presented in the remaining sections (134.1–20),[10] until Bandin decides to stop answering (*vi-√ram-* 20a). Aṣṭāvakra then concludes the last sentence, and the silence of his adversary serves as the means of determining the winner of the contest.

Let us now proceed a little further in the text to the moment when Bandin admits defeat and reveals his identity as Varuṇa's son. In fact, the very purpose of the *sattra* in honour of his father Varuṇa which Bandin performed at the same time as King Janaka's sacrifice took place, was to drown the Brahmins, and thus Kahoḍa as well (MBh 3.134.24–25):

> *bandy uvāca |*
> *ahaṃ putro varuṇasyota rājñas tatrāsa sattraṃ dvādaśavārṣikaṃ vai |*
> *satreṇa te janaka tulyakālaṃ tadarthaṃ te prahitā me dvijāgryāḥ ||*
> *ete sarve varuṇasyota yajñaṃ draṣṭuṃ gatā iha āyānti bhūyaḥ |*
> *aṣṭāvakraṃ pūjaye pūjanīyaṃ yasya hetor janitāraṃ sameṣye ||*
>
> Bandin said: "I am the son of King Varuṇa! There (i.e., at Varuṇa's place) the Twelve-year *sattra* was conducted, at the same time as yours, O Janaka. That is why these excellent twice-borns were sent by me (there)".

Two primary considerations may be inferred from this series of *śloka*s. From the technical point of view, a direct connection to the Vrātya context is established by the explicit reference to the *sattra* in the text.[11]

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[10] For the sake of brevity, the content of the riddles will not be dealt with here (see Shulman 1996: 165–166).

[11] Studies by Falk (1986), Heesterman (1962; 1964; 1982; 1993; 2012), and Candotti and Pontillo (2015) have shown how the ritual of *sattra* is characteristic of the Vrātya groups. In particular, scholars have acknowledged some affinities between the *sattra* and the *vrātyastoma* in the way the ritual is conducted (Biswas 1955; Heesterman 1962: 3). The *Śrauta* ritual is highly systematised, but this does not mean that it is free of contradictions, which can be seen as evidence of a process of preserving—without eradicating—obsolete practices that diverge from the tradition in the making. Heesterman's assessment of the *vrātyastoma* is in terms of this "generational clash" between old and new rites that would have been successive within the same Brahmanic religion. In this context, he emphasises the

Secondly, Bandin's association with Varuṇa is key to the secondary interpretation of the whole Upākhyāna from a parallel standpoint. This echoes a Vedic image that appears to be implicit throughout the text and only becomes explicit at this point in the narration, even in the language. The repetitive use of the emphatic adverb *uta* in *pāda*s 24a and 25a provides the text with a Vedic veneer.[12]

Aṣṭāvakra twice recounts Bandin's aggressive competitiveness, which resulted in the violent deaths of his former opponents. (MBh 3.134.23, 26):

> *aṣṭāvakra uvāca* |
> *anena vai brāhmaṇāḥ śuśruvāṃso vāde jitvā salile majjitāḥ kila* |
> *tān eva dharmān ayam adya bandī prāpnotu gṛhyāpsu nimajjayainam* ||
> (…) *viprāḥ samudrāmbhasi majjitās te vācā jitā medhayā āvidānāḥ* |
> *tāṃ medhayā vācam athojjahāra yathā vācam avacinvanti santaḥ* ||
>
> Aṣṭāvakra said: "In fact, after he won the debate, he drowned the Brahmins in water: So I have heard. But let this Bandin get the same *dharma*s today. After catching him, drown him in water. (…) The wise were drowned by you in the waters of the ocean: Though endowed with knowledge, they were overwhelmed by the word through intelligence. Now I have raised the word by means of intelligence: That the wise may examine it."[13]

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need to make a methodological distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. The conceptual difference between the two definitions lies in the hypothesis of conversion implied by the former, and the need for purification that restores the individual from a previous state of contamination implied by the latter.

12 Lüders (1951: 9–12; 41–56) in particular has extensively recognised Varuṇa as a god traditionally associated with water. Since the sacrifice offered by Bandin is strictly and violently associated with water, this is even more significant.

13 The verbal root *ud-*√*(d)hṛ* appears 123 times in the MBh, predominantly with the sense of "to elevate (something)." Only five occurrences are in the perfect tense, found in MBh 1.16.7; 1.73.22; 3.134.26; 5.29.35; 12.333.11. The most commonly preferred meanings, based on various textual contexts, involve lifting or raising something (followed by an accusative case, e.g., MBh 1.16.7), pulling something out from somewhere (with ablative case, e.g., MBh 1.73.22), and once, freeing or saving someone from something (accompanied by both an ablative and an

In fact, since Aṣṭāvakra is the victor, he has the power to determine Bandin's fate. Therefore, he can punish him in any manner he sees fit, in this instance, by condemning Bandin to death by drowning (MBh 3.134.29–30):

> *janaka uvāca* |
> *śṛṇomi vācaṃ tava divyarūpām amānuṣīṃ divyarūpo 'si sākṣāt* |
> *ajaiṣīr yad bandinaṃ tvaṃ vivāde nisṛṣṭa eṣa tava kāmo 'dya bandī* ||
> *aṣṭāvakra uvāca* |
> *nānena jīvatā kaś cid artho me bandinā nṛpa* |
> *pitā yady asya varuṇo majjayainaṃ jalāśaye* ||
>
> Janaka said: "I hear your speech; having a divine, superhuman form, you are evidently a divine being in a bodily form. You who defeated Bandin in the debate, now, according to your wish, Bandin will be granted to you." Aṣṭāvakra said: "O King, there's no point in my letting Bandin live. If Varuṇa is his father, let him be drowned in the lake!"

This closing phrase is technically in line with the principle that the loser's inadequate knowledge in *brahmodya* warrants the application of violence (Parpola 2015: 139). In fact, as demonstrated by the Upaniṣadic and Buddhist models, the loser faces death. Ultimately, all the defeated Brahmins are resurrected along with Kahoḍa, while Bandin enters the water as the final sacrificial victim to fulfil once and for all the sacrifice for Varuṇa (MBh 3.134.37).[14]

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accusative, e.g., MBh 5.29.35). Therefore, considering the *usus scribendi*, I have opted for the translation "raised the word."

[14] As Shulman (1996: 165) previously noted: "(…) both rites achieve conclusion, an end to the riddles, only when the 'crooked' twelve-year-old boy [i.e., Aṣṭāvakra] completes the thirteenth verse. By doing so, he propels the earthly ritual to superior status, as the defeated riddlers returning from the sea announce (…)."

3. Concluding remarks: An echo of Vedic imagery and the two opposing Vrātya models

The current article presents a preliminary study of the *Aṣṭāvakrīya--Upākhyāna* (MBh 3.132–134) and offers its interpretation based on various patterns that are probably associated with a Vrātya context, both ritually and historically. Furthermore, an effort is made to explore a similar perspective from the point of view of a wider Vedic imagery.

In relation to the Vedic background, certain aspects of the story appear to stem from the Vedic representation of the creation myth, such as progeneration, death and rebirth (Kuiper 1960). References to the Vedic imagery of the creation myth may possibly be observed in the pregnant Sujātā, who could symbolise Uṣas' progeneration, seeing that the goddess is closely linked with the concept of prosperity (see MBh 3.132.13b). Especially since Uṣas is also recognised by Kuiper "as the goddess of the [potlatch] contest."[15] From this perspective, it could be argued that the successful hero, Aṣṭāvakra, corresponds to Indra "as the prototype of the competing hero" (Kuiper *ibid.*: 236). Finally, the key piece of evidence in favour of the current interpretation dwells in the fact that the text explicitly and unambiguously identifies Bandin as Varuṇa's son.

As for the technical passage regarding the *brahmodya*, it can be argued that there are two opposing models of Vrātyas in the knowledge competition between Aṣṭāvakra and Bandin. Indeed, Aṣṭāvakra may be seen as representing a "positive" Vrātya, whereas Bandin appears to embody a "negative" one. Aṣṭāvakra's heroics of reviving defeated Brahmins are accepted by Brahmanic orthodoxy, while his arrogance is overlooked. In contrast, Bandin is considered a negative Vrātya due to his violent competition for knowledge. His aggressive Vrātya approach is condemned, and this leads to his demise.

[15] According to Kuiper (*ibid.*: 234–236) Uṣas "is implored to bestow vital strength and sons," but she is also associated with the bestowal of wealth, which is implied as "a divine blessing, a gift." Moreover, "this wealth is also won in strife, in contests which are fought with the traditional weapons of the Aryans, viz. with races and word duels."

The slaying of Bandin by Aṣṭāvakra may resemble Indra's slaying of Vṛtra and the subsequent transfer of Varuṇa's duties to safeguard the cosmic law, as depicted in the Vedic myth.[16] Varuṇa, through his son Bandin, is also greatly impacted by the outcome of this contest. After Aṣṭāvakra's victory, he has the task of bringing back to life all the Brahmans who had been drowned by Bandin and sent to Varuṇa's simultaneous and rival sacrifice.[17] Indeed, the ritualised debates in the Hindu and Buddhist philosophy inherited the agonistic nature of ancient verbal contests. The outcome of these debates was often described using metaphors such as "life" and "death," and the participants were known for their emphatic, theatrical aggressiveness. In both traditions, the victorious speaker was praised for their prowess and likened to the god Indra, whose voice was said to rumble like thunder. It is worth mentioning that Aṣṭāvakra, who commences his argument with Bandin, is already "thundering" (*garjamāna*) in a manner akin to that of Indra.

To sum up, the *Mahābhārata* reflects the post-Vedic scenario of Sanskrit literature. Although the text presents itself as a Brahmanical manifesto, it also includes elements of archaic social organisation as defined by Brockington (1998: 214) and previously identified by Held (1935) as belonging to the Vrātya phenomenon. The *Mahābhārata* may possibly serve once again as a reliable source for understanding the Vrātya socio-cultural context (Hiltebeitel 2001; Vassilkov 2016).

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[16] See Kuiper *ibid.*: 219: "[after Indra slayed Vṛtra,] to Varuṇa (…) a new function is now assigned as guardian of the cosmic law (*ṛtá*), which remains hidden in the nether world." For a thorough and detailed discussion of Varuṇa and *ṛtá* see also Lüders 1959.

[17] Thanks to one of the reviewers for having drawn my attention to this subject.

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Vrātya or Ancient Indo-Aryan Violence?
Challenge and Defeat within the Patterns of Vedic and Buddhist Dialogues[1]

ABSTRACT: *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* (JB) II 225 and *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* (PB) XVII 1.9 have been authoritatively interpreted by Falk (1986: 29–30) as evidence that the Vrātyas behaved in a peculiarly aggressive way. The present study puts forward the hypothesis that such violence was not a distinguishing feature of the Vrātyas, but an inherited common trait of the Indo-Aryan culture, which, for example, is well documented in its strong warrior tradition, in clashes between clans and families for dynastic reasons, in the frequent use of curses and other acts of verbal violence and in the ritual violence of bloody sacrifices. These various deep-rooted cultural patterns might all have stemmed from the original highly competitive social organization of the Indo-Aryan people. The way in which Vrātyas selected their leader,

[1] All translations are by the authors unless explicitly stated. Chiara Neri is responsible for §§ 2; 2.2; 2.3; 2.4; 3; 3.1; 3.2; 4; 5; Appendix 1; 2 and Tiziana Pontillo for §§ 1.1, 1.2; 1.2.1; 1.2.2; 2.1. We are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable corrections and insightful suggestions. All remaining errors are our own.

regardless of his birth status, in line with Buddhist meritocracy, also proves to be in line with this assumed competitiveness of the origins.

This paper concentrates on the violence inherent in the Vrātya dialogues and their dramatic consequences. These dialogues are compared here with the Old and Middle Indo-Aryan "verbal contests" on the basis of Vedic and Pali texts, in the wake of work by Witzel (1987) and Manné (1990), who singled out relevant schemes and formulas in both the Brahmanical and Buddhist sources. Indeed, the earliest sources provide ample evidence of agonistic sapiential debates (the so-called *brahmodya*s), in which the loser is forced to submit to the winner or even undergo a much worse punishment.

KEYWORDS: Old and Middle Indo-Aryan violence, comparing Vedic and Pali sources, Vrātyas, *brahmodya*, verbal contests, debate and curses

1. The common pairing of Vrātyas and violence

1.1. The most ancient occurrence of the plural *vrātya*s

Vrātyas have been connected to violence and especially to bloody rituals ever since their first mention in the Vedic sources. Apart from *Śaunaka Atharvaveda* XV, whose antiquity is heavily questioned, the earliest occurrence of the appellation Vrātya belongs to the *Vājasaneyī-saṃhitā* (VS). This occurs in a passage dealing with human sacrifice (*puruṣamedha*)[2] and may be found in the *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* (TB)[3] in

[2] Human sacrifice seems to be admitted to in Vedic sources: see Krick 1977: 93–94; Houben 1999: 121–122.

[3] TB III 4.5.1:

> *nadībhyaḥ pauñjiṣṭham ṛkṣīkābhyo naiṣādaṃ puruṣavyāghrāya durmadaṃ gandharvāpsarābhyo vrātyam prayudbhya unmattaṃ sarpadevajanebhyo 'pratipadam avebhyaḥ kitavam iryatāyā akitavam. piśācebhyo bidalakāram. yātudhānebhyaḥ kaṇṭhakakāram* (The Sanskrit text is based on the edition published in Punyakhyapattane in 1999).
>
> To the Rivers a fisherman [has to be offered], to the Ṛkṣīkās a hunter, to the Puruṣavyāghra a mad man, to the Gandharvas and Apsaras a Vrātya, to the assailing

quite a similar form. A Vrātya as a human being of low status figures in the list of victims offered to various mythological beings:

> VS XXX 8: *nadībhyaḥ pauñjiṣṭham ṛkṣīkābhyo naiṣādaṃ puruṣavyāghrāya durmadaṃ gandharvāpsarobhyo vrātyam prayugbhya unmattaṃ sarpadevajanebhyo 'pratipadam ayebhyaḥ kitavam īryatāyā akitavaṃ piśacobhyo bidalakārīm. yātudhānebhyaḥ kaṇṭhakīkārīm*.[4]
>
> To the Rivers a fisherman, to the Ṛkṣīkas a hunter, to the Puruṣavyāghra[5] a mad man, to the Gandharvas and Apsaras a Vrātya, to the teams[6] an intoxicated man, to the troops of serpents and demons a confused man, to the lords of dice a gambler, to the lady of excitement a non-gambler, to the demons Piśacas a woman who splits logs, to the evil spirits a woman who is a necklace-maker.

A Vrātya man is offered here as a sacrificial victim to the Gandharvas and the Apsaras and Gandharvas are often associated with the Vrātyas on a divine level. This fact was clearly expounded by Vasilkov (1989–1990: 395) who emphasized similarity in looks and behaviour characterizing both the Gandharvas and the long-haired "members of the unmarried boys' age-group, i.e. 'brotherhoods' of young warriors in many cultures."[7] Hauer interpreted the Gandharvas mentioned in this VS passage as beings who drive people mad or possess them,

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beings a drunk/mad man, to the troops of serpents and demons a confused man, to the favourable lords a gambler, to the lady of excitement a non-gambler, to the demons Piśācas a log splitter, to the evil spirits a necklace-maker.

4 The Sanskrit text is based on Weber 1972.

5 For more details on the Ṛkṣīkas, divine feminine beings related to the world of hunters, and on the supernatural being called Puruṣavyāghra, probably an embodiment of the spirit of one of the members of god Rudra's wild host, see Vassilkov 2015: 238–245 and Pontillo and Sudyka 2016: 275–287.

6 Hauer (1927: 54 fn. 3) assumes that this refers to demons who drive man to intoxication or mad excitement.

7 Dore 2016 is entirely devoted to the study of the relationship between the Gandharva imagery and the Vrātya culture.

relying on the Vedic compound *gandharvagṛhīta*, which we found in *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* (AB) V 29.2, *Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* (BĀU) III 3.1 and III 7.1, where a maiden (*kumārī*), a daughter (*duhitṛ*) and a wife (*bhāryā*) are respectively "possessed by a Gandharva." However, in the above attestation from the VS, the Vrātyas already appear to be alien to a common Brahmanical[8] religious landscape and victims rather than agents of violence.

1.2. The most quoted Vedic passages on the Vrātyas

In order to take a closer look at the attribution of peculiar aggressiveness to the so-called Vrātyas, the present paper will re-examine some of the most iconic texts that, with very few exceptions, have dominated all recent literature on the Vrātyas. Indeed, in recent years whenever scholars have mentioned the Vrātyas *en passant*, they have also regularly quoted the occurrences of the term which we re-analyze here. However, we focus on the challenge-style of dialogues that characterise the Vrātyas and, in particular, try to show how all the ancient Indo-Aryan "verbal contests"[9] in the Vedic and Pāli sources presuppose a simple but bewildering principle, which might be best summed up with the following formula:

> the insufficient knowledge displayed by X allows Y to use violence against X.

Starting from the premise that the Vedic and Buddhist dialogues exhibit comparable patterns as first demonstrated by Witzel (1987), we attempt to show that this does not depend on any particular inclination to violent behaviour, more so as in the case of the Buddhists it should, as a matter of course, be categorically excluded. In our reconstruction,

[8] Hereafter, the term "Brahmanical" is used to denote a cultural context dominated by the Brahmanical class, especially that established after the so-called "Śrauta reform."

[9] Here we adopt the expression coined by Kuiper 1960.

this shared aptitude is rather taken as a remnant trace of a very ancient Indo-Aryan pattern.

Having said that, let us reiterate three important points Harry Falk underlined in the chapter titled "Die Aggressivität," found in his reference work on the Vrātyas (1986: 29–30):

Vrātyas harassed a very specific target group, namely a chieftain or a Brahmin (*rājani vā brāhmaṇe vā*), to rob them for their own benefit;	*Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra* (BŚS) XVIII 24
they injured the Brahmin who is not to be injured (*ahiṃsyaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ hiṃsanti*);	JB II 225
they used to beat the one who should not be beaten with a stick (*adaṇḍyaṃ daṇḍena ghnantaḥ*).	PB XVII 1.9

1.2.1. The reading of BŚS XVIII 24 is not indisputable

Candotti and Pontillo (2015: 200) have recently advanced a different interpretation of the same passage,[10] basing their conclusions on a specific inquiry into the sense of the term *pratigraha* as it appears therein:[11]

> BŚS XVIII 24: *te rājani vā brāhmaṇe vā pratigraham icchante māsāya vartave vā.*[12]
>
> They seek somebody who plays the function of receiving on their behalf/to their benefit in a chieftain or in a brāhmaṇa, either for a month or for a season.[13]

[10] As for some consequences of this reading on the general assessment of the Vrātya phenomenon, see Pontillo and Dore 2016: 12.

[11] For the *Ṛgveda*, *Śaunaka Atharvaveda* and *Taittirīya-Saṃhitā* occurrences of *pratigraha*, see Candotti and Pontillo 2020.

[12] The Sanskrit text is based on Kashikar 2003.

[13] Cf. tr. Hauer 1927: 105–106: "Sollen sie von einem König oder einem Brahmanen ein Geschenk erbitten zu Gunsten des Monats oder der Jahreszeit (in der sie opfern)." [They should ask for a gift from a king or a Brahmin for the benefit

In fact, if this sentence is not read in isolation but in context, it becomes obvious that the protagonists, i.e., the supposed aggressive robbers, are going to perform a sacrifice, the *Vrātyastoma*, which, as Candotti and Pontillo set out to show in 2015, was a sacrificial practice aimed at: a) forming an alliance between the members of the group and appointing a leader; b) distributing the booty amongst the whole group at the end of each expedition. Their reconstruction was mainly based on: 1) Thite's (2004) translation of the sentence *vratyānāṃ pravāse vrātyastomāḥ* in ĀpŚS (22.5.4) as "In (order to lead the) life of the Vrātyas, *vrātyastoma*s [are to be performed]"; 2) Thite's (2004) relevant comment, which highlighted the fact that *vrātyastoma*s are soma-sacrifices to be obligatorily performed by *āhitāgni*-sacrificers, i.e., sacrificers entitled to maintaining sacred house fires, and not people who needed to have some state of pollution removed.

Of course, our aim in proposing a new interpretation of this text is simply to find more clues about the most ancient layer of the Vrātya phenomenon. With this in view, let us take a look at the two sentences from BŚS XVIII that follow the sentence which have caught Falk's attention in 1986 and was analyzed above.

> *te yam abhisaṃjānate taṃ sthapatiṃ kurvanti. sa eṣāṃ vratāni carati. so 'dhaḥ saṃveśy amāṃsāśy astryupāyī bhavati. tad dhi dīkṣitavratam.*
>
> They appoint him as their leader (*sthapati*-), whom they agree on. He brings about their observances. He becomes one who lies down [on the ground], who does not eat meat, who does not approach his wife. This is the observance of the consecrated man (*dīkṣita*-).

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of the month or season (in which they sacrifice)]; tr. Falk (1986: 28): "Diese (Vrātyas) wünschen sich bei einem König oder Brahmanen eine Gegengabe für einen (bestimmten Monat) oder eine Jahreszeit" [These (Vrātyas) require in response an offering from a king or a Brahmin for a (particular month) or season.]; tr. Kashikar (2003: 1207): "They seek acceptance by a king or a brāhmaṇa one month or one season before."

In the light of the expanded passage, we believe that it is not hard to assume that rather than describing a group of people who want to find "favour" (*pratigraha*) with a chieftain or a brahmin, the text is actually talking about a horde whose chief is the immobile core of their aggressive action and the trustworthy keeper and dispenser of their goods. The ritual meaningfulness of the term *pratigraha* we find here should not be underestimated. As is well known, in the Brahmanical tradition, *pratigraha* becomes one of the six activities prescribed for the members of the *Brāhmaṇa-varṇa—Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (MDh*Ś*) I 88. But the denotation of the action of "receiving goods" as *dakṣiṇā*s by means of the masculine noun *pratigraha-* is well documented in earlier Vedic sources, e.g., in our BŚS itself, which is probably the earliest *Śrautasūtra*, in BŚS XXI 10 (*dakṣiṇānāṃ pratigraha*) and in another of the earliest Śrautasūtras, i.e., in *Lātyāyana-Śrautasūtra* (LŚS) V 5.1–2 (*dakṣiṇapratigraha*).[14]

Furthermore, several Vedic sources actually contain a number of occurrences of inflected forms of the corresponding verbal base *pratigrah-* in this technical sense, while others have the deverbal *nomen agentis pratigrahitṛ* often opposed to *dātṛ-* "giver" (see Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 203; 2020: 36–41). It therefore seems plausible that the quite ancient BŚS XVIII 24 retains a partial memory of the role of the granter. Moreover, the performers of the mentioned Vrātyastoma might have been common warriors who lived as a brotherhood and were looking for somebody to become their leader, an individual who had perhaps already proven himself trustworthy and thus fit for the role of the *pratigraha*. In brief, according to the first quoted sentence from BŚS XVIII 24 re-examined here, what the community is described as doing amounts, in fact, to simply looking for a consecrated *primus inter pares* chosen on a meritocratic basis.

Other Śrautasutra passages confirm that when the Vrātyas are going to perform the Vrātyastoma sacrifices, they choose their leader simply according to his merits. In other words, they select from among themselves the one who is the best endowed with power, by virtue of

[14] Here we follow Parpola's dating (1968: 201; 1973: 15; 2011: 342).

study or descent, or, even in the absence of these [qualities], because of his accumulation of wealth, and regardless of his birth status (see e.g. LŚS VIII 6.1–2). It is extremely interesting to note that this model of leader selection is attested to specifically in the Buddhist tradition where the spiritual leader achieves this status because of his huge merits, i.e., for having reached the spiritual state of Buddha or of *arhant*. The study by Neri (2015) demonstrated further that such a meritocratic election was also in use among warrior tribes such as the Licchavis, Mallas, and Vajjis.

1.2.2. Again on the Vrātya aggressiveness

Let us now read the second and third passages that Falk (1986) considered as documenting Vrātya aggressiveness.

> JB II 225: (…) *uta hy ahiṃsyaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ hiṃsanti śrotriyaṃ vā gṛhamedhinaṃ vā.* (…)[15]
>
> (…) And they harm a brahmin who should not be harmed, who is conversant with the sacred knowledge or who performs the domestic sacrifices. (…)

Here the crucial verbal base *hiṃs-* "to harm, to injure" appears twice, both times to strongly emphasize the fact that Vrātyas expressly violate trustworthy priests. In other words, the passage bemoans the fact that Vrātyas do not respect hierarchies and rights acquired by birth or status.

> PB XVII 1.9: (…) *aduruktavākyaṃ duruktam āhur adaṇḍyaṃ daṇḍena ghnantaś caranty adīkṣitā dīkṣitavācaṃ vadanti ṣoḍaśo vā eteṣāṃ stomaḥ pāpmānaṃ nirhantum arhati yad ete catvāraḥ ṣoḍaśā bhavanti tena pāpmano 'dhi nirmucyante.*[16]

[15] The Sanskrit text is based on Vira and Chandra 1986.
[16] The Sanskrit text is based on A.Ch. Śāstri and P. Śāstri 1935–1936.

> They define a not-wrong speech as a wrong speech. They beat with a stick somebody who does not deserve it. They speak a *dīkṣita*-language although they are not *dīkṣita*s. Indeed, the sixteen-versed *stoma* is apt to remove the guilt. Inasmuch as these four verses are made up of sixteen syllables, by means of this [stoma] they are freed from their guilt.

In this Sāmavedic Brāhmaṇa, Vrātyas again seem to do something that is considered neither justifiable nor permissible. Our translation is not so far from Caland's (1931: 456) "They call good words bad," but the short sentence, *aduruktavākyaṃ duruktam*, has been the subject of much discussion. In the past, some scholars (e.g., Horsch 1966: 418) assumed that the Vrātyas might have spoken a variety of Prakrit in which the consonant clusters of Sanskrit were simplified, and hence the Vrātyas found Sanskrit "difficult to pronounce" (*durukta*-). According to Hauer (1927: 69), they might have pronounced "vile speeches" or, for Biswas (1955: 34), they might have used "words with malevolent intent." Elena Mucciarelli (2015: 79) compared these translations and advanced a view that Vrātyas might have been said (*ukta*) to use a language which was *durukta*- in the sense of the antonym of *sūkta*, i.e., a language different from that of the *Ṛgveda* which is "well said, properly recited." Moreover, Hock (2016: 103; 114) returning to a hypothesis advanced in 1991 interpreted the puzzling phrase as "Speech that is not difficult to speak / badly spoken they consider difficult to speak / badly spoken," in a ritualistic more than in a linguistic sense. He considered this detail as being merely one of several strategies adopted in the Vedic texts to intentionally paint the Vrātyas in a bad light due to an increasing ritualistically oriented Brahmanical "anti-Vrātya" propaganda program. We are persuaded that within such a propaganda the whole passage hints at an assumed injustice and subjectivity on the part of the Vrātyas in assessing their rivals' answers in the verbal contests, with an attitude which is ultimately violent.

Nonetheless, in our opinion, the so-called Vrātyas were the latest descendants of the ancient Indo-Aryans themselves, namely those who went on to perform competitive sacrifices and who adopted

a behaviour that the Brahmanical sources started to stigmatize as foreign and unprecedented. This allowed the authors of Brahmanical texts to rid themselves forever of censured facets of their common Indo-Aryan past, by attributing them exclusively to the Vrātyas. The criticized subjectivity they complained about could merely be determined by the sheer absence of formalization of everything in rigid rules and predictable behaviour, as was instead dictated by the emergent Varṇāśrama system.

Let us read an example of verbal clashes between different groups of Vrātyas.

> BŚS XVIII 26: (…) *atho haitena kurubrahmaṇāṃ putrā ījire. teṣām aupoditir gaupālāyana vaiyāghrapadya sthapatir āsa. tena heṣṭvā pañcālān vrātyā abhiprayayus tān ha pitara ūcur mā putrakāḥ pañcālān yasiṣṭopavādino vai pañcālā upa vo vadiṣyantīti tān hānādṛtyaiva prayayus.* (…)
>
> (…) The sons of the brahmins of the Kurus performed this sacrifice. Vaiyāghrapadya from the Gopāla gotra and son of Upodita was the *sthapati*. Having performed this sacrifice, the Vrātyas went against the Pañcālas. The elders said to them: "Dear boys, do not try to go against the Pañcālas whose custom is to call down curses; they will curse you." Disregarding them, the young ones went (against the Pañcālas). (…)

Here an expedition is undertaken by the young Kurus against their kinsmen, the Pañcālas. These young Kurus are also significantly called *kurubrahmaṇāṃ putrāḥ* with an epithet which is not appropriate for people who have absolutely nothing to do with what the Brahmanical system represents, and, at the same time, they are defined as the *vrātya*s. And their attitude to verbal contests is underlined, together with the rivals' habit of slandering and cursing their opponents.

The episode continues with the narration of the attack which took place the day after the *ukthya*-performance: the young men who had just been expressly defined as the *vrātya*s have assailed the Pañcalas who were also performing the sacrifice. In this case, too, their leader

is depicted more as a brahmin than a warrior, since we are told that "he knew the Vedas by heart." Indeed, he starts by addressing a ritual question to the Kurus who have crept up on the sacrificial arena from behind. Since he is confident in his knowledge of the Vedas, he can definitely ask his rivals for the Vedic source of a ritual detail which in his opinion is not based on tradition.

> BŚS XVIII 26: (…) *tān ha śvo bhūte bahispavamānam sarpato 'nvālebhire pavitram vai bahiṣpavamāna ātmānaṃ pavayiṣyāmaha iti vadanto 'tha pañcāleṣu gandharvāyaṇo vāleya āgniveśyo 'nūcāna āsa tān ha saha sarpataḥ papraccha ke sarpanto 'ti vayaṃ maruta iti teṣāṃ vaḥ ka sthapatir ity ahaṃ viṣṇur ity aupoditir gaupālāyano*[17] *vaiyāghrapadyaḥ pratyuvāca yat kiṃ cakartha kas tac cacāreti ha parokṣāvratam anunirdideśeti.* (…)
>
> On the next day they (i.e., the Kurus) approached them from behind as they crept up on the purifying rite during the Bahiṣpavamāna prayer, saying: "Bahiṣpavamāna is sacred, let us purify ourselves!" Among the Pañcālas there was Vāleya, from the Gandharva gotra and son of Agniveśa, who knew the Vedas by heart. At the same time he asked those creeping (Kurus): "Who is creeping?" [They answered:] "We are the Maruts." "Who is your *sthapati*?." Vaiyāghrapadya from the Gopāla gotra and son of Upodita answered: "This is I, that is Viṣṇu." "Whatever was done by all of you people, who [actually] did it? Who pointed out this secret practice [and on] what previous model was it based?" (…)

In the end, the leader of the Pañcālas actually curses the rival Vrātyas since they were obviously unable to answer his question about the specific ritual feature. What is extremely interesting here is that the ignorance attributed to his opponents, that is their inability to supply the required answer, is precisely what justifies the curse. In other words,

[17] We are adopting the reading *gaupālayana*, suggested by one of the two anonymous reviewers, although both Kashikar's (2003: 1210) and Caland's (1982: 374) editions use the reading *gaurpālayana* here and in the passage mentioned above.

the insufficient knowledge displayed by X allows Y to use violence against X and even to banish X.

> BŚS XVIII 26: (…) *tān hovācāviduṣo va upāvādiṣmāpa vo hnumaha iti pitā vai tatputrān upāvādīditi hainam ūcuḥ pāpīyasī te prajā bhaviṣyatīti tathā haivāsa. tato ha vā etat pañcāleṣu gandharvāyaṇā vāleyā āgniveśyāḥ pāpāyitā iva mahākulaṃ ha tatpurā babhūva sa yo vrātyam upavaded evam evainam upavaded atha. yo vrātyo 'laṃ prativacanāya syād evam evainaṃ pratibrūyāt*.
>
> He (the one from the Gandharva gotra) said to them "We have cursed you as ignorant; now we are refuting you." "This is as if a father [were to] curse the sons"—so they (Kuru) replied to him, "Your offspring will meet with evil." So it happened. Since then, the descendants of Vāleya of the Gandharva gotra and sons of Agniveśa fell into disgrace. Formerly it was a great clan. One who curses the Vrātyas will similarly be cursed. The Vrātya who is capable should reply to the one who disputes in this way.

Thus, the mutual cursing is followed by a final, more general statement that solemnly attributes this predilection for verbal contests and curses to the Vrātyas as such, even though the whole episode seems to resemble a *brahmodya*, i.e., a Vedic verbal contest on ritual and theological topics.[18]

2. Verbal contests in the Old and Middle Indo-Aryan culture

As pointed out by Witzel (1987), verbal contests documented by Old and Middle Indo-Aryan sources share several features, and there is, moreover, a clear trace of a common early use of the just mentioned *brahmodya*.

[18] "(…) type de questions-énygmes et de réponses alternées auquel se plaisent les joutes religieuses" (Renou and Silburn 1949: 87).

2.1. Old Indo-Aryan *brahmodya*s

Indologists generally associate *brahmodya*s with the Upaniṣads, especially the earliest ones. The term itself occurs in BĀU III 8.1, as noted by Brereton (1997: 2). A well-known example is included in the episode regarding the proud Dṛpta Bālāki (Gārgya's descendant) who, in both BĀU II 1–20 and in *Kauṣītaki-Upaniṣad* (KauṣU) IV 1, challenges king Ajātaśatru by claiming to be able to provide an excellent formulation of the truth. He begins by identifying the Brahman with various things, which are all promptly rejected by the king, until he is forced to concede defeat and ask Ajātaśatru to accept him as his pupil. Analogously, Śvetaketu fails to answer King Pravāhana Jaivali (or Citra Gāṅgyāyani) in BĀU VI 2.1–16, *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* (ChU) V 3.1–10.10 and KauṣU I 1–2.[19] Thereafter Śvetaketu returns home and his father Uddālaka Aruṇi decides to go to the king to learn from him, after admitting the latter's superiority. Even the story of Naciketas who did not stop before asking the last question to his father Uśan, patron of a Sarvavedasa sacrifice, is highly illustrative. Naciketas overstepped the limit of his own knowledge—a crucial fact in this dramatic kind of dialogue as proven by Witzel (1987: 364 fn. 5)[20]—and was cursed by his father *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad* (KaṭhaU I 4) and made to enter the kingdom of Yama prematurely.

Nonetheless, as George Thompson (1997: 22) has recently reminded us, the classical *brahmodya*s were "deeply embedded in Vedic poetic style, and thus even present in the earlier poetry of the *Ṛgveda*." For instance, a section of one of the most famous long *brahmodya*s texts contained in VS XXIII perfectly matches a passage from the mysterious hymn *Ṛgveda* (ṚV) I 164. Brāhmaṇas also document analogous contests, sometimes involving the same characters, who return later in

[19] For a synoptic analysis of these three versions of Śvetaketu's story see Olivelle 1999: 54–57.

[20] More recently, Magnone (2019: 212–215) pointed out how *brahmodya* unified two traditions sharing the special attention paid to the discordance between speech and truth, namely one that threatened the bursting of the head of those who spoke without knowing and one that punished those who did not speak despite knowing.

the *Mahābhārata*, as Diletta Falqui's article in this volume shows. One of the protagonists of the telling story of Śvetaketu, namely his father Uddālaka Aruṇi, is also the main character of a dramatic *brahmodya* in the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB),[21] when Śauceya is the loser in the ritual contest on the meaning of the Agnihotra and becomes Uddālaka's pupil. In these texts, the violent context is also expressed by the fact that the head of the one who challenges another, that is the one who exceeds the limits of his knowledge, bursts and is shattered. The following passage mentions such a risk.[22]

> ŚB XI 5.3.13:
> *śauceyó jñaptáḥ. imā́ni samitkāṣṭhāny úpāyāni bhágavantam íti sá hovāca yádevaṃ nā́vakṣyo mūrdhā́ te vyápatiṣyad ehy úpehī́ti*. (…)[23]
>
> Śauceya, after being instructed, said: "These are the logs for fuel: may I come to you who are venerable as a pupil." He replied: "Should you not have said this, your head might have flown apart: come, enter as a pupil!" (…)

And what exactly is this head that flies apart? Heesterman (1985: 58) did not consider this expression to be a metaphor, at least not at the beginning, but a part of the cyclical exchange of roles between the patrons of the sacrifice and the officiant priests, a feature that characterized the pre-classical sacrifice.[24] This sacrifice was supposedly based on a conflict between two agonistic parties, so that the severed head of the enemy would actually have been the sacrificial head,

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[21] This story also occurs in *Gopatha-Brāhmaṇa* (GB) I 3.14.

[22] An analogous risk is mentioned in TB III X 9.5, where one of Atyaṁha Āruni's students is sent to Plakṣa Dayyāṃpāti to question him about the Sāvitra fire: his original teacher advised him not to ask questions beyond a given limit (i.e., beyond the *prāṇa* subject), because otherwise his head would burst. See Witzel 1987: 372.

[23] The Sanskrit text is based on Weber 1964.

[24] Indeed, the Vedic texts only mention the case of Vidagdha Śākalya, who died shortly after losing at the end of a discussion with Yājñavalkya (BĀU III 9.26: (…) *tasya ha mūrdhā vipapāta*. "(…) His head really shattered apart"; see Witzel 1987: 375.

i.e., a human skull was probably a mandatory element of the first layer in the *agnicayana*, i.e., the building of the fire altar (Heesterman 1985: 50). Such a scenario was recognized by Parpola (2015: 139) in the following advice given to the guardians of the sacrificial horse when they start their year-long expedition before the performance of the Aśvamedha in ŚB XIII 4.2.17:

> *yád yad brāhmaṇajātám upanigácheta tát tat pṛcheta brā́hmaṇāḥ kíyad yūyám aśvamedhásya vitthéti te ye ná vidyúr jinīyā́ta tānt sárvaṃ vā́ aśvamedhaḥ sárvasyaiṣa na veda yó brāhmaṇaḥ sánn aśvamedhásya na véda só 'brāhmaṇo jyéya eva.*
>
> Whenever you meet somebody who was born a brahmin, you should ask them: "O brahmins, how much do you know of the Aśvamedha?" And you should deprive of any property those who did not know because the Aśvamedha is everything. A brahmin who knows nothing of the Aśvamedha, is not a brahmin, he should indeed be deprived of any property.

What is evident here is a clearly hostile background, accompanied by the well-known ritual violence prevalent in ancient Indo-Aryan culture. Ritualistic and theological disputations must have been extremely important within the earliest sacrificial system. Thus, Parpola (2015: 139), on the basis of Vedic passages such as our starting quotation, i.e., BŚS XVIII 24, concludes:

> It is for the sake of such ritualistic and theological disputations that the vrātinas[25] should select the most learned among them as their leaders. Ignorance was used as a pretext for robbing and killing, and such ancient practice seems to be reflected in the learned disputations of the Upaniṣads (…).

On the other hand, a sentence like the one reminding us that a brahmin who is ignorant is not a brahmin is intriguingly close to renowned

[25] This is another word used for Vrātyas, which Valentina Ferrero worked on in these same Proceedings.

Buddhist reflections on the Brāhmaṇa Varṇa and on social classes in general, such as the early *Uraggavagga*, 141 in the *Suttanipāta* or *Soṇa* 4 in the *Udāna*.

2.2. Verbal contests in Buddhist Theravāda tradition

In the early Buddhist literature as represented by the Theravāda Pali canon, the discussions and the debates could also be considered to be a form of competition. The debates, typical elements of Indian culture, have a special place in the Pali canon. In fact, there are many *sutta*s that describe discussions between the Buddha and people who held different views, frequently leaders of other religious groups, whether brahmins or ascetics. We cannot be sure that these debates occurred and that they proceeded as described in the *sutta*s, though it is certainly the case that they promote the Buddhist position, being an important instrument for the transmission of the Buddha's teachings. They also provide valuable information about rival religious groups and their ideas.

In the following discussion, we will analyze the competitive aspect present in debates found in select early Buddhist *sutta* texts, the presence of the *brahmodya* technique, and the peculiar violent splitting-of-the-head formula aspect that occurs in some of these verbal competitions.

2.3. The structure of debates in Buddhist texts

Joy Manné (1990) tries to demonstrate that each canonical Pali *sutta* collection (*nikāya*) had a different function and purpose,[26] and that the *sutta*s can be divided into three main categories: sermons, debates, and consultation. For our purpose, particularly interesting

[26] Manné (1990: 29) for example claims that the original purpose of DN [*Dīghanikāya*] being the attraction of converts, that of MN [*Majjhimanikāya*], the presentation of the leader, etc. both as a real person and as an archetype (a Tathāgata), and the integration of new monks into the community and the practice."

are the debates that Manné (1990: 32) defines as "a formal intellectual confrontation in which one party challenges another in a contest of religious knowledge."[27] Manné argues that there are three types of debates: the dramatic debate, which is recounted as it goes along; the reported debate, which is a debate that has taken place in the past and which the Buddha repeats on a later occasion; and finally, the debate with hypothetical opponents during which the views of certain general groups are disputed. The debates generally have as their main features two opponents: the Buddha or a senior monk and an adversary. Commonly the good credentials and social status of the opponent are presented at the beginning. These debates concern a variety of topics, but most frequently the Buddha is challenged on his teachings. Generally, the discussion ends with the rival being defeated and his admission of this.[28]

In many respects the Buddhist debates seem to have inherited elements from the earliest Indo-Aryan debates, for example, according to Manné (1990: 52): "The challenge, the refutation and the defeat in the Buddhist debates conform to the same rules, allowing for the difference in situation, as in the brahmanical debates." Similarly, the consequences of the defeat, which generally see the defeated asking to become a lay disciple or be ordained as a monk, are similar in Vedic text.[29] The authors of these Buddhist texts seemed to have

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[27] According to Gombrich 2009: 7: "When he encounters non-Buddhists, the Buddha hardly ever initiates a discussion or begins by putting forward his own views. As T. W. Rhys Davids pointed out a century ago, this reminds us of Socrates, who always got discussions going by asking the other party to state their views." For further information about the Buddha's debate technique, see also Gombrich 2006: 17–26.

[28] "The participant who is forced in the course of the debate to admit that he does not know the whole truth stops putting challenging questions and instead is reduced to asking the Buddha to explain the matter to him. In this way, he acknowledges that he is defeated" (Manné 1990: 53).

[29] As for the rule according to which "In the course of the discussion, participants who do not know the whole truth have to state this clearly, they must cease questioning (…) and thus declare defeat, or they must become the pupil of the winner," as explained by Witzel (1987: 372), see above § 2.1.

assimilated some elements of the Brahmanical-Upaniṣadic debate style in order to defeat the brahmins themselves, such as that reported in the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* where, as Black (2011) demonstrates, the Buddha knows the Vedic tradition better than the brahmin Ambaṭṭha.[30] Not surprisingly, the Buddha, like the Vedic sages, always wins the debate. But several features of the Buddhist and Vedic model may have their origin in a more ancient Indo-Aryan milieu.

2.4. The *brahmodya* in a Buddhist context

One of these features common to Vedic and early Buddhist texts is the old *brahmodya* technique, which was discussed in § 2.1 with reference to Brahmanical literature.

Thompson (1997) shows that there are different types of *brahmodya* which exhibit different forms of complexity. However, this term is frequently used in a more generic way to illustrate a competitive debate that increasingly became more common in India. As Fiorucci (2015: 14) claims:

> By the time of the early Upanishad these debates were no longer taking place exclusively in the arena of sacrifice but began also taking place in public assembly halls and in the courts of kings. With the proliferation of the ascetic movement around the time of the Buddha it seems that the institution of debate became a normal feature of the urban landscape.

[30] Black (2011: 150) claims: "The Buddha defeats Ambaṭṭha not because he convinces the young brahmin with Buddhist doctrine, but rather because of his method of argumentation. The Buddha employs a number of debating tactics that are characteristic of the ways that brahmins establish their knowledge in the Upanishads. In particular, the Buddha uses an etymology, appeals to the authority of ancient verses, and invokes the authority of Vedic sages. The Buddha utilizes each of these rhetorical methods—some of which he rarely uses in discussions with non-brahmins—to demonstrate that he knows the Vedic tradition better than Ambaṭṭha knows it himself."

The Buddhist equivalent of the *brahmodya* is what is referred to in Pali sources as the *kathojja* ("dispute, quarrel"), the equivalent of Sanskrit *kathodya*, but the terms are not synonyms. While the *brahmodya* is a verbal contest based on ritual and theological questions (and later becomes a ritualized exchange), the *kathojja* is a debate or dispute characterized as "open," or at least much less ritually formalized.

What can be considered to be a particular form of *brahmodya* present in the Pali canon is the *satya-kriyā*[31] in Sanskrit or *sacca-kiriyā* in Pali. This compound consists of the noun Skt. *satya*, P. *sacca*, "truth" (PED s.v.), and the noun Skt. *kriyā*, P *kiriyā*, "doing, performance, action" (DP s.v.), derived from the verbal root *kṛ* "to do." It designates an oath, a solemn declaration of truth by means of personal integrity or virtue.[32] These truth statements are used for a variety of purposes, such as helping other people, ending a natural disaster, and invoking or meting out a punishment.[33]

3. The violent aspect of verbal competitions: the shattering of the head and Vajrapāṇi / Vajirapāṇi

Witzel (1987: 381ff.), in his fine article on the subject, compares the image of the shattered head in the Brahmanical and Buddhist literature. In fact, the Pali canon provides several mentions of instances where a person who is debating with the Buddha does not reply to a *sahadhammika*, a reasonable question, and the Buddha tells him that his head will be split into seven pieces if he does not answer. This

[31] According to Thompson (1997: 19): "The response portion of these *brahmodyas* is often no more than a naked, and even aggressive, assertion of self that is unsupported by any serious attempt at answering the questions posed in the interrogation portion. Such an act of self-assertion is essentially what a *satyakriyā* also is." The Sanskrit *satya-kriyā* (or *satyādhiṣṭhāna*) is associated to the *brahmodya* also by Thieme (1964: 30; 1984: 117) and Witzel (1987: 373), etc.

[32] The *sacca-kiriyā* dates back to as early as the *Ṛgveda*: it refers to an ancient Vedic belief that human beings could derive power out of truth by fulfilling their duties (*vrata*) according to the cosmic order (*ṛta*). See Brown 1972: 261–262.

[33] See Thompson 1997: 19–20.

punishment was also utilised in Vedic literature (see above § 2.1) and in these sources, this description is quite realistic, whereas in the Pali canon it seems to have a more symbolic value. In the Brahmanical context, the head-splitting occurs by itself as a result of a curse, while in the Buddhist case it never actually takes place.

In Buddhist texts, the character who threatens to carry out the splitting of the head is Vajrapāṇi / Vajirapāṇi. He is a *yakṣa* / *yakkha* who protects the Buddha. At a certain point, during the competitive dialogue, precisely when the Buddha's competitor refuses to answer a question or admit his ignorance or defeat, Vajirapāṇi appears, only visible to the Buddha and the opponent, and his *vajra*/*vajira* is ready to split the head of the Buddha's rival.

In the *Papañcasūdanī* (Ps) II 277 = *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (Sv) I 264 Vajirapāṇi is identified with Sakka,[34] who is the same as Śakra or Indra, the god of war in Vedic mythology, and in the *Ayakūṭa Jātaka* (Ja n. 347, III 145–147) there is an account of how Sakka made a promise to protect the Bodhisattva in his future life.[35]

Interestingly, in the Gandharan Buddhist art, Vajirapāṇi is depicted in the form of Heracles with whom he has common iconological and physiognomic elements, a topic to which many studies have been devoted (e.g., Flood 1989, Schwab 1998, Tanabe 2005, Filigenzi 2006).[36] For us, the use of Heracles to depict Vajirapāṇi is interesting

[34] *yakkho ti na yo vā so vā yakkho sakko devarājā ti veditabbo* "'*yakkha*': whether he is a *yakkha* or not, Sakko, king of the gods, is what is meant."

[35] Moreover, according to Malasekera (s.v. Vajirapāni), this arrangement was made in fulfilment of a promise made by Sakka—in the presence of Mahā Brahmā, on the occasion when the Buddha was reluctant to preach the Dhamma (see *Vinaya Piṭaka* i.5f)—that if the Buddha were to agree to establish the Dhamma, Sakka would afford it the necessary protection. For a more complete information on Vajirapāni in the Buddhist and Indian literature, see Lamotte 2003a and 2003b.

[36] Homrighausen (2015: 33) provides an interesting, likely reason for this: "The Kushans, invading nomads, included Herakles in the cosmopolitan imagery they developed as they incorporated urban centers into their empire. The Buddhist sangha responded to this royal usage of Herakles by inserting him into their artistic lexicon, both as a figure of protection for the Buddha and as a subtle claim of royal patronage of the sangha."

because it shows the adoption of another powerful and violent defender for the protection of the Buddha and his teaching.

3.1. The analysis of the head shattering formula

Here we will analyze some formulas used for the shattering of the head.

1. The first type is formed by combining *muddhā,* "head," and the verb *phalati,* "to split, shatter," frequently used in the future tense, and *sattadhā* (adv.) "in seven pieces."

This version of the formula is present, for instance, in the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* (*Digha-nikāya* (D) I 87–110). Here a young arrogant brahmin, Ambaṭṭha, goes to the Buddha to check whether he has the thirty-two marks of the great man (*mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇa*). He offends the Buddha by speaking about his lowly Sakyan origin which he contrasts with his own superior Brahmanical origins. Then, the Buddha contests Ambaṭṭha's claim by demonstrating that his family has a lower origin than that of the Sakyas and by rejecting the idea that superiority is due to birth. When Ambaṭṭha, pressed by the Buddha, refuses to answer, Vajirapāṇi appears, though only visible to him and the Buddha, and the Buddha threatens him by saying, *etth' eva te sattadhā muddhā phalissati*, "your head will shatter into seven pieces right here."[37] This forces Ambaṭṭha to end the conversation and admit his defeat. Thus, in the context of competitive dialogue, we seem to have an actual threat, which Vajirapāṇi is there to enact.

The other *sutta* in which there is a competitive dialogue and in which Vajirapāṇi appears is the *Cūḷasaccaka-sutta* (*Majjhima-nikāya* (M) I 227–237). Here Saccaka, the Nigantha's son, asks the Buddha questions about self-identification with the form (*rūpa*) and the other *khandha*s, but when the Buddha answers his questions and asks him other more difficult ones (the reasonable questions), he refuses to answer. Vajirapāṇi then appears and Saccaka is forced to admit his defeat (M I 231, 29, 34).

[37] See D I 94, and cf. D I 95,7; D I 95,12–13.

In other *sutta*s, such as the *Vuṭṭha-sutta* (*Aṅguttara-nikāya* (A) IV 373–378), this formula assumes a different aspect. Here, a monk accuses Sāriputta, one of the Buddha's two chief disciples, of having hit him, but later retracts his false accusation and confesses that he had lied. Thus, the Buddha asks Sāriputta to forgive him using these words:

> A IV 378: *khama sāriputta imassa moghapurisassa, purāssa tatth'eva sattadhā muddhā phalissatī ti.*[38]
>
> Sāriputta, pardon this foolish man before his head splits into seven pieces right there!

In this case, the splitting of the head is more a *tópo*s, a natural punishment for a wrong action.

A special use of this formula is in the *Sutta-nipāta* (Sn 976–1031). In this *sutta*, there is a brahmin who curses another brahmin by telling him that if he does not give him some money his head should split into seven parts in seven days (Sn v.983: *sattame divase tuyhaṃ, muddhā phalatu sattadhā*).

A goddess appears to the poor brahmin, who was worried about this curse, and reassures him by telling him that the only one who can give him an explanation is the Buddha. Although in this case, the context of a dialogical debate is missing, the reference to cursing someone with a wish that their head split in seven probably represents an ancient cultural practice.

The Buddha explains to this brahmin the splitting of the head in metaphorical terms:

> Sn v. 1026: *avijjā muddhā ti jānāhi, vijjā muddhādhipātinī, saddhāsatisamādhīhi, chandaviriyena saṃyutā.*[39]

[38] The Pali text is based on Morris and Hardy 1885–1900.
[39] The Pali text is based on Andersen and Smith 1913.

> Know that ignorance is the head. Knowledge is the head-splitter, joined with faith, mindfulness, and concentration, (and) with resolution and energy. (tr. Norman 1992: 115)

The Buddha thus on this occasion gives to this sentence an exquisitely symbolic and sapiential meaning.

In the *Suruci-jātaka* (n. 489), a devoted wife is attacked by a goblin and Sakka defends her as an honest woman by saying:

> Ja IV 320 (x7): *musā me bhaṇamānāya, muddhā phalatu sattadhā.*[40]
>
> If I am speaking lies, then may my head split in seven.

So, in this case, our formula is a statement of truth, probably well-known and accepted as a guarantee of sincerity.

In the *Candimā Sutta—Saṃyutta-nikāya* (S) I 50—there is also no debate, but a dialogue between deities. A deity named Candimā (the moon) falls captive to Rāhu, god of the asuras (i.e., during an eclipse). Candimā asks the Buddha for help and the latter asks Rāhu to let Candimā go, stating that Buddhas have compassion for the world and Rāhu agrees. While recounting this event to the asura Vepacitti, Rāhu tells him:

> S I 50: *sattadhā me phale muddhā jīvanto na sukhaṃ labhe*
> *buddhagāthābhigīto 'mhi no ce muñceyya candiman ti.*[41]
>
> My head would have split in seven pieces
> While living I would have found no ease
> If, when chanted over the Buddha's verse
> I had not let go of Candimā. (tr. Bodhi 2000: 145)

In this case as well, the expression "my head would have split in seven pieces" seems to be the negative consequence of a bad action.

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[40] The Pali text is based on Fausbøll 1877–1896.

[41] The Pali text is based on Feer 1884–1898.

In the *Milindapañha* (Mil) this expression is associated with the context of the giving of gifts, where it is said that if someone obstructs bestowing of a gift meant for someone else out of jealousy, his head will split into a hundred or a thousand pieces:

> Mil 157: *sace koci issāya uddissakaṭaṃ upakkhaṭaṃ paribhogaṃ antarāyaṃ kareyya phaleyya tassa muddhā satadhā vā sahassadhā vā.*[42]
>
> If anyone out of jealousy, were to make a stumbly block (to a gift made) for a specific person (to a gift) that had been prepared, then would his head split into hundred or a thousand pieces. (tr. Horner 1969, vol I: 220–221)

Thus, this later text suggests that the number seven of the other examples is merely symbolic, or suggestive, because here the head will split into a hundred or a thousand pieces. It is also a further example of the splitting of the head as an automatic consequence.

3.2. The Analysis of the head shattering formula in the Pali Texts

A very similar formula involves another verb but lacks reference to the number of parts the head would split into: *muddhā* and the verb *vipāṭeti / vipphalati*, "to split." This formula seems to have more a rhetorical function when compared to the previous examples.

In the *Kūṭadanta-sutta* (D I 127–149), the Buddha discusses the sacrifice but the brahmin Kūṭadanta accepts just a part of some of the Buddha's assertions.[43] He justifies himself by saying that he is forced to endorse them because if someone does not subscribe to the well-spoken words of the Buddha, his head shall split:

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[42] The Pali text is based on Trenckner 1880.

[43] He does not approve totally because some of the Buddha's claims puzzle him, as for example, when the Buddha says that he remembers events from his past life.

> D I 143: *nāhaṃ bho samaṇassa gotamassa subhāsitaṃ subhāsitato nābbhanumodāmi, muddhāpi tassa vipateyya, muddhā pi tassa vipateyya, yo samaṇassa gotamassa subhāsitaṃ subhāsitato nābbhanumodeyya.*[44]
>
> I do not fail to approve; for he who approves not as well-said that which has been well spoken by the Samana Gotama, verily his head would split in twain. (tr. Rhys Davids 1899: 181)

Here, too, there is a reference to the idea that if someone were to contradict a truth statement his head would automatically split. In this case, the context is a non-competitive dialogical debate and our formula seems to be used rhetorically.

The same rhetorical trend is present in the *Pāthika-sutta.* Here it is asserted that if a certain monk who persists in holding erroneous beliefs were to voice them in front of the Buddha, his head would split:

> D III 13: *sace pi 'ssa evam assa ahaṃ taṃ vācaṃ appahāya taṃ cittaṃ appahāya taṃ diṭṭhiṃ appaṭinissajjitvā samaṇassa gotamassa sammukhībhāvaṃ gaccheyyan ti, muddhā pi tassa vipateyyā ti*.
>
> If he thinks that, holding to those words, to that idea, maintaining that opinion, he would come to meet the Samana Gotama, his head would split asunder. (tr. Rhys Davids 1921: 17)

The image of a splitting head acts as a rhetorical use of punishment; almost a warning. It also occurs in many other *sutta*s, such as the *Cīvara-sutta* (S II 219–222 and see in particular S II 220), where the Buddha admonishes a monk, stating that if one says he sees and hears something and that it is not true, his head would split[45]. This is used as a deterrent to being insincere.

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[44] The Pali text is based on Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890–1911.

[45] The context of the *sutta* is more complex because it concerns the quality of a teacher and the capacity to recognize it, but the use of the splitting-head formula seems to be a purely rhetorical and conventional usage.

A similar case, but in a positive context, is present in another passage of the Aṅguttara-nikāya, where a layman asks Ānanda to explain Dharma to him and after receiving his answer, says:

> A I 221–222: *kyāhaṃ, samma āyasmato ānandassa subhāsitaṃ subhāsitato nābbhanumodissāmi. muddhā pi tassa vipateyya yo āyasmato ānandassa subhāsitaṃ subhāsitato nābbhanumodeyyā ti.*
>
> How, friend, could I not thank the Venerable Ānanda for his well-stated words? If one were not to thank the Venerable Ānanda for his well-stated words, one's head would split apart! (tr. Bodhi 2012: 308)

Thus, in this case, our phrase seems to be rhetorically used to show gratitude.

In the Dhammapāda as well it is said that knowledge and fame destroy the fool, splitting his head.[46] Thus, also in this generic case, the formula does not seem to be more than a rhetorical expression.

We can find probably some other texts in which this formula is present in different contexts and usages. But to sum up, the first formula (*muddhā* + *phalati* + *sattadhā*) is used in several slightly different ways and with different shades of meanings, namely, it is used in competitive dialogues (with or without Vajirapāṇi appearing), as a natural consequence of bad actions, as a truth statement, as a curse, and as a proof of sincerity or a deterrent from insincerity. The second formula (*muddhā* + *vipāṭeti* / *vipphalati*) for the most part is used purely rhetorically.

[46] Dhp v. 72: *yāvadeva anatthāya, ñattaṃ bālassa jāyati. hanti bālassa sukkaṃsaṃ, muddham assa vipātayaṃ* "'A reputation for skill arises for a fool merely to his disadvantage; it destroys the fool's good share (of merit), splitting his head" (tr. Norman 1997: 11).

4. The Buddhist view on excessive debate

However, excessive verbal wrangle is depicted as decidedly negative in some *sutta*s. Ascetics who engage in debates immoderately are often considered conceited, proud, and narrow-minded. The Buddha admonished his monks to refrain from such debates because even if they end in victory, the common consequent attitude that "only this is true" is a negative mental attitude. Moreover, the purification of the mind cannot be achieved through engagement in debate and argument, see Sn vv. 830–834, and in particular:

> Sn v. 832: *ete vivādā samaṇesu jātā etesu ugghāti nighāti hoti*
> *etam pi disvā virame kathojjaṃ, na haññadatthatthipasaṃsalābhā.*
>
> These disputes have arisen among (other) ascetics. Among them there is the elation (of victory) and the depression (of the defeat). Seeing this too, one should abstain from dispute, for there is no other aim but praise and profit. (tr. Norman 1992: 56)

Furthermore, as is well known, the Buddha himself refuses to answer the famous ten metaphysical questions (Skt. *avyākṛta-vastu*, P *avyākata-vastu*, "indeterminate question") about the nature of the world, the existence of a soul and the status of a Tathāgata.[47]

5. Conclusions

Verbal disputations were part of the Indo-Aryan culture right from the start. They developed over time with different nuances in several Indo-Aryan branches, including the so-called Vrātyas, who, as we have seen, actually launched verbal challenges even regarding ritual

[47] See e.g. *Cūḷamāluṅkya-sutta* (M n. 63), *Aggivacchagotta sutta* (M n. 72) *Sabbāsava-sutta* (M n. 2), etc.

issues and raged against those who could not answer, i.e., the losers, or cursed them and their descendants.

Especially worthy of attention is the competitive aspect in dialogues reported in Buddhist literature, which occasionally incorporates the violent head-splitting image. This image is clearly adopted from the early Indo-Aryan usage but re-adapted in Buddhist texts. This image generally has a symbolic value, is a proof of superiority in a competitive discussion. But in other texts, it functions as a proof of honesty or a *saccakiriyā*, an oath, a curse, or a rhetorical statement. While the Buddha sometimes engages in debates, he generally advises his monastics to not engage in excessive debate, especially when it comes to metaphysical questions (§ 4).

The violence which is often present—at least in symbolic terms—in verbal competition in Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical environments, may be the residual element of a much older and more extensive competetiveness of the warrior and the ascetic aspects of the Indo-Aryan culture (§§ 2.1.; 2.2.; 3.; 3.1). In fact, the original Indo-Aryan pattern of violent verbal contests is well documented in the earliest Vedic sources, whereas the Brahmanical tradition seems to have partly rejected the aggressiveness of such competitions, exclusively attributing this characteristic to the Vrātyas, by way of employing a program of a systematic anti-Vrātya propaganda, which runs parallel to the emerging culture of non-violence.

All in all, it is difficult to establish the intensity, or circumscribe the perimeter, of the origins of the Indo-Aryan violence, even if considering solely the verbal one, but what seems clear to us is that at some stage this violence has been diligently, systematically and knowingly attributed to the Vrātyas alone. This was probably done by the brahmins so as to cast the Vrātyas in a bad light, to distance themselves from the violence that they too had practiced earlier, and ultimately, to marginalize the Vrātyas.

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APPENDIX 1

E.g.: *muddhā* + *phatati* + *sattadhā*

Reference	Text	Translation	Notes
D I 94	*etth' eva te sattadhā muddhā phalissati*	Your head will split into seven pieces right here.	Competive dialogue + Vajirapāṇi
D I 95,7	*etth' ev' assa sattadhā muddhā phalissati*	His head will split in seven pieces right here.	
D I 95,12–13	*etth'ev'assa sattadhā muddhaṃ phālessāmi*	I will cause his head to split in seven pieces right here.	
M I 231,29	*etth'ev'assa sattadhā muddhā phalati*	His head splits into seven pieces right here.	Competive dialogue. + Vajirapāṇi
M I 231,34	*etth'ev'assa sattadhā muddhaṃ phālessāmi*	I will cause his head to split in seven pieces right here.	
A IV 378	*tatth'eva satthā muddhā phalissati*	His head shatters into seven pieces right there.	Natural punishment for a wrong action
Sn v. 983	*sattame divase tuyhaṃ, muddhā phalatu sattadhā*	In seven days may your head be shattered into seven pieces.	Curse

Reference	Text	Translation	Notes
Ja IV 320	*muddhā phalatu sattadhā*	May [my] head split into seven pieces.	Statement of truth
S I 50 (x 2)	*sattadhā me phale muddhā*	My head would have split into seven pieces.	Statement of truth. Negative consequence of bad action
Mil 157	*phaleyya tassa muddhā satadhā vā sahassadhā vā*	His head would split into a hundred or a thousand pieces.	Impersonal punishment

APPENDIX 2

E.g. *muddhā + vipāṭeti / vipphalati*

Sutta	Text	Translation	Notes
D I 143 D III 13	*muddhā pi tassa vipateyya* *muddhā pi tassa vipateyya*	His head would split.	Rhetorical function. Warning
S II 220	*muddhā pi tassa vipateyya*		Rhetorical function. Deterrent to be honest
A I 222	*muddhā pi tassa vipateyya*		Rhetorical function. Gratitude
Dhp 72	*muddham assa vipātayaṃ*		Rhetorical function. Warning

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Some Observations about Warrior-gods and Distinctive Weapons in the Imagery of Vrātyas*

ABSTRACT: Heesterman (1962), moving away from the hypothesis of a non-Aryan background for the Vrātyas, went far beyond the brahmanical-grounded heterodox interpretation of their culture (see also Candotti and Pontillo 2015, Pontillo and Dore 2016, Vassilkov 2016). The Vrātyas are usually associated with the cult of Rudra (see, e.g., Charpentier 1911, Hauer 1927, Falk 1986) who is regarded as an outsider god. Dore (2015: 55; 2016) remarks that there is no reason to "consider the relationship between the Vrātya and Rudra as being more important or more revelatory compared to the relationship with Indra." Taking for granted the influence of both gods on the culture and on the literary representation of the culture of this group, the present paper focuses on the analysis of Vedic textual traditions dealing with the bow associated with the leader of the Vrātyas, in order to understand to what extent such a weapon represents evidence of their aggressiveness.

KEYWORDS: Vrātyas, Indo-Āryan weapons, Vedic literature

* All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

In a recent article, af Edholm (2017: 4) summarized the most relevant traits of Vrātya culture in the following points:

1. Rudra, the Rudras (including the Maruts), and Indra as central deities.
2. Rituals performed by a group (*vrātyastoma*, *sattra*) with a leader (*gṛhapati*, *sthapati*), who is *primus inter pares*.
3. References to activities typical of a warrior-society and sodality, such as seasonal expeditions or raids and time spent in the men's house (*sabhā*).
4. Use of specific gear: bows and arrows, black garments or animal-skins, et cetera.
5. A "sort of heroic asceticism aimed at god-like status" (Pontillo 2016: 210).

In the present paper I am going to briefly deal with point 1 and then focus on point 4 by studying the primary sources and the textual traditions of the element of the bow carried by the Vrātya leader, in order to understand to what extent it represents an evidence of the violent traits often associated with this group and if different descriptions of such a weapon may have had cultural and religious implications. In doing so, I will analyse and compare Vedic textual evidence dealing with the description of the Vrātyas, to obtain a clear overview of the general perception of this group, over centuries and in different traditions.

1. Rudra / Indra

On the one hand, Falk (1986) underlined the parallelism between the Vrātya leader and both Rudra and Indra while, on the other, he identified the group of the Vrātyas with the Rudras and the Maruts,[1] respec-

[1] The Maruts, described as Vrātyas, are called *daiva* in PB 22.1.1 and PB 24.18.1: Caland's translation as "the adherents of the God" underlines the importance of Rudra, who is usually referred to as *deva* in many Vedic passages, such as, for example, in the Brahmanical literature (i.e., PB). Heesterman (1962: 18) envisages *daiva* as those "who aim to Heaven." See also Candotti and Pontillo (2015: 155–161) and Witzel (2004).

tively conceived as companions of Rudra and Indra themselves. Selva (2019: 331) studied the "myths and functions of IE deities specifically connected with warriors," while acknowledging the previous research by McCone (1987) and Kershaw (2000); in particular he recalls the results reached by the former, who

> (…) has highlighted the role of the two deities corresponding to the two main age sections of male societies that were allowed to bear arms: the **korios*, the youth warband who formed the frontline of the army, fought on foot, naked, wearing only their belt or a light armour and weapons, especially a bow; and the **teuteh2*, the army of the adults, equipped with full armour, a spear and shield, and who fought on chariots or, later, on horseback. To these two groups correspond a **korios* god, armed with a bow, who embodies the furious rage of the Männerbund and its connection with liminality, the wilderness, and death; and a **teuteh2* god, armed with a spear or club, who represents the adult warrior. This duality is represented by couples like Óðinn / Týr, Quirinus / Mars, Rudra / Indra, Lug / Núadu and Enyalios / Ares.[2]

The comparability between (a) Rudra / Indra and their groups on one hand, and (b) the Vrātya leader and his group, on the other, could be conceived as being dependent on the distinctions between the **korios* god (Rudra) and the **teuteh2* god (Indra).

The prominence of the god Rudra in Vrātya culture has been pointed out by scholars such as Charpentier (1911), Hauer (1927), Choudhary (1964: 88), Falk (1986), af Edholm (2021). Parpola (1973: 37ff), apart from underlining "the connection of the *vrātya*s and of Rudra with the death cult," focuses on the "close parallelism" between the appearance of the Vrātyas and that of Rudra, which is analysed and compared in detail on the basis of primary Vedic sources (we will focus on this point below): both the Vrātya leader and Rudra enjoy

[2] See Bollée (1981: 173), where we find an explanation of the parallel between Indra and the Late Avestan god Miθra, who is described as endowed with dark attributes and who is worshipped by violent Iranian groups organized into brotherhoods.

a parallel status in the AV, and likewise, a more general comparison could be made regarding their hair, the turban and garments they wear, the ornaments and even their chariots and weapons.[3]

There are many traits that can be interpreted as evidence of the parallelism between Rudra and the Vrātyas: violence, rowdiness and aggressiveness are often associated with this group and with Rudra himself; Rudra is also the god excluded from the divine sacrifice (ŚB 1.7.3.1; 3), an exclusion which is mirrored by the Vrātya's condition of outsiderhood, which can be overcome by performing the ritual called *vrātyastoma*.[4] But, with respect to Rudra, Keith (1913: 159) points out that "we cannot believe that to the composers of the *Brāhmana*s he was a god not wholly received into the circle of the gods" and uses the so-called *śatarudriya* in the Yajurvedic texts as an argument.

As regards Indra's role in the Vrātya culture, Dore (2015; 2016) already shed light on the importance of this god for access to heaven in the most ancient Vedic *saṃhitā*s. Dore (2015: 180ff) focuses on

[3] Note that Keith's (1913: 157) interpretation on this topic, expressed in response to the theory advanced by Charpentier about the possibility of seeing the Vrātyas as the founders of the Rudra-Śiva cult, is essentially very different.

[4] PB 24.18. Heesterman (1962: 6–7) concludes that the *vrātyastoma* in fact celebrates the covenant between the Vrātyas when they were engaged in an expedition. He gives an overview of the content of the primary sources stating,

> (…) apart from the idea of purification (Baudh, Kāṭhaka, Mānava), the purpose of the *vrātyastoma*s is given by some texts as reaching heaven (JB, PB, Śāṅkh.). Other texts, without mentioning a specific wish to be attained, state the occasion at which they serve: the uniting of a number of *vrātya*s is a group (Lāty., Kāty.), their setting out on a *vrātya* expedition (Āp., Hir.), the end (Mān.) and the beginning of their expedition (Kāṭh).

See also Candotti and Pontillo 2015: 158:

> (…) the function and the aim of the Vrātyastoma might have considerably changed overtime in parallel with the shift of the notion of vrātyahood. There is always a tension also in "orthodox" texts relating to Vrātyastoma rites between the individual and ethic, and the communitary and cultural, that denounces, so to say, the effort made by their authors to absorb and dilute cultural differences in an ecumenical ideology.

the possibility of seeing "the mythological figure of the *vrātya* as a consecrated warrior" in Indra's relationship with Bṛhaspati. Moreover, the author underlines that the *sattra* context, where the *ṛṣi*s come together to honour Indra, recalls the "descriptions—on a mythological level—of an assembly of *vrātya*s (the consecrated warriors) with their Ekavrātya as the leader."

The Ekavrātya is mentioned in ŚS 15.1.6-8[5] (≅ PS 18.27.4–7):

> *sá ekavrātyó bhavat sá dhánur ā́datta tád evéndradhanúḥ || nī́lam asyodáraṃ lóhitaṃ pr̥ṣ̥thám nī́lenaivā́priyaṃ bhrā́tr̥vyaṃ prórṇoti lóhitena dviṣántaṃ vidhyatī́ti brahmavādíno vadanti*
>
> He became the sole Vrātya. He took the bow, that was Indra's bow: blue its belly, red the back. With the blue he keeps away the unfriendly cousin, with the red he wounds the enemy. So say the *brahmavādin*s.[6]

According to Dore (2015: 35), this passage hints at a "transfiguration" rather than a mere identification: this process is accomplished by a man who "seems to replace Indra in his role as lord of the gods." Pontillo (2019: 256–257) explains that there are textual elements in the Vedic literature that may be interpreted as traces of an alternative conception of the accessway to heaven; these are the epithet *dyútāna* and, as well, "other images of fire" referred to a "potential deity," which can be compared to the "so-called warrior / ascetic *ekavrātya*" mentioned above in ŚS 15.1.6–8. Indeed, he is "a man who achieves a divine status, and who is praised as a God, a Chieftain, and a Lord."

In the passage quoted above, a pivotal act of such an apotheosis process is the taking possession of Indra's bow.

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[5] Withney 1905.

[6] See also Whitney 1905.

2. The tradition of the bow

This weapon, referred to as *indradhanuḥ*, "Indra's bow" is described in the AV as *nī́lam asyodáraṃ lóhitaṃ pr̥ṣṭhám*, "blue its belly, red the back." Neri and Pontillo (2023: fn 9) explain:

> The genitive pronoun *asya* had been interpreted by Whitney and Lanman (…) as a neuter form, referred to the neuter *dhánus* 'bow' (…) and intended as the rainbow, commonly called Indra's bow.

However, they also point out that "its (*asya*)," which might equally well be "*his* (asya)" thus precisely agreeing with *udára* 'belly' and *pr̥ṣṭhá* 'back' respectively, might refer to the masculine *sá ekavrātyá*." Neri and Pontillo opt for the latter option in their translation.

Thus, the very first description of the Vrātya's bow in the Vedic literature is related to the god Indra; in fact, it is precisely Indra's bow. For the sake of the present research, this is the conclusion that must be drawn from the AV, even though the meaning and interpretation of the whole stanza is always open to debate.

As already recalled above, the Vrātyas are traditionally described as being armed with bows and arrows: the Vedic sources present a clear distinction between the leader's equipment and that of the group, also in terms of garments. According to PB 17.1.14–15, and here resumed according to Caland's translation (1931), the Vrātyas wear "upper garments with red borders and corded fringes,[7] with strings at each side; each of them has a pair of shoes and doubly-joined goat's hides."[8]

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[7] But note that this interpretation is uncertain.

[8] The so-called Vrātyas can be associated with the Vrātyas: they share a connection which, according to Candotti and Pontillo (2015: fn 28), "is not founded on a mere phonetic similarity but rather on some shared details of their respective equipment." They are also

> (…) characterized by specific warlike equipment (22.3.17: *ujjyadhanvānaḥ* "[And] with bows with loosened strings"; 22.3.18: *kalāpinaḥ* "[And] with quivers (of arrows).") All these features largely coincide with those depicted in LŚS 8.5.8: *lohitoṣṇīṣā lohitavāsaso nivītā ṛtvijaḥ pracareyur upotaparuṣā*

The Vrātya leader on the other hand, referred to as *gṛhapati*, wears a turban, a garment with black fringes and two goat skins and he carries a goad;[9] he also possesses a silver ornament which, according to Caland (1931), is worn around the neck. He carries a weapon called *jyāhṇoḍa* (*jyāhroḍa* in the subsequent sources). The tradition in line with this description is the following:

> *uṣṇīṣaṃ ca pratodaś ca jyāhṇoḍaś ca vipathaś ca phalakāstīrṇaḥ kṛṣṇaśaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇavalakṣe ajine rajato niṣkas tad gṛhapateḥ* (PB 17.1.14)[10]
>
> A turban and a goad and a *jyāhṇoḍa* and a (chariot)—for bad roads—covered by a wooden board; and a black garment, two black and white skins, a silver ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *gṛhapati*.
>
> *uṣṇīṣaṃ pratodo jyāhroḍo ratho vipathaḥ phalakāstīrṇo ‘śvo ‘śvataraśca yugyau kṛṣṇaśaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇabalakṣe ajine rajato niṣkaḥ tadgṛhapateḥ* (ĀpŚS 22.5.5)[11]
>
> A turban, a goad, a *jyāhroḍa*, a chariot—for bad roads—covered by a wooden plank, a horse and a mule fit to be yoked, a blackish garment, two black and white skins, a silver ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *gṛhapati*.
>
> *uṣṇīṣaṃ pratodo jyāhroḍo ratho vipathaḥ phalakāstīrṇo ‘śvo ‘śvataraś ca yugyau kṛṣṇaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇavalakṣe ajine rājato niṣkaḥ || tad gṛhapateḥ ||* (HŚS 17.2.33)[12]
>
> A turban, a goad, a *jyāhroḍa*, a chariot—for bad roads—covered by a wooden board, a horse and a mule fit to be yoked, a black garment, two

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ujyadhanvānaḥ (The officiants should perform [the sacrifice] wearing red turbans and red garments and having a thread round the neck, with wrapped arrows and bows with loosened strings).

9 A comparative perspective underlines the continuity of these characteristics in the Indo-European culture (see table 12 in Selva 2019).

10 All the quotations from PB are based on Śāstrī and Śāstrī 1935–1936.

11 All the quotations from ĀpŚS are based on Thite 2004.

12 Āgāśe and Śaṃkara (1907–1932).

black and white skins, a silver ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *gṛhapati*.

teṣāṁ vyañjanāny uṣṇīṣaṃ pratodo jyāhroḍo ratho vipathaḥ phalakāstīrṇaḥ kṛṣṇadaśaṁ vāso nīlabalakṣe ajine rājato rukmas tad gṛhapateḥ | (MānŚS 9.3.3)[13]

Their characteristics are a turban, a goad, a *jyāhroḍa*, a chariot—for bad roads—covered by a wooden board, garment with black fringes, two black and white skins, a silver circular ornament: this is (the equipment of) the *gṛhapati*.

The almost synoptic similarity of the content of the primary sources dealing with the description of the Vrātya's equipment may signify that they essentially continue the tradition of the PB, which is chronologically the first source on the topic.

Now, we must add the BŚS to these sources, a text which also deals with the description of the Vrātyas:

atha yatkṛṣṇaṃ vāsaḥ kṛṣṇatūṣaṃ paridhatte dīkṣitavasanasya tad rūpam | *atha yat kṛṣṇabalakṣyāvajine dhārayati kṛṣṇājinayos tad rūpam* | *atha yat suvarṇarajatau rukmau bibharti parigharmyayos tad rūpam* | *atha yat kṛṣṇam uṣnīṣaṃ dhārayati dīkṣitoṣṇīṣasya tad rūpam* | *atha yac carmamayair bāṇavadbhis tisṛdhanvaṃ dhārayati dīkṣitadaṇḍasya tad rūpam* || (BŚS 18.24)[14]

He is dressed in a black garment with black border: this is the sign of the garment of the *dīkṣita*.[15] He wears two black and white skins: this is the sign of the two skins of black antelope. He brings two gold and silver circular ornaments: this is the sign of the two ritual vessels used to prepare

[13] Gelder 1961.

[14] All the quotations from BŚS are based on Kashikar 2003.

[15] The syntax of this exegetic passage stresses the importance of the content of the correlative clause in this sense: despite the structure of the proposed translation, the aim of the author of the text is to specify the nature of, e.g., the "sign of the garment of the *dīkṣita*" and not the opposite.

hot beverages. He wears a black turban: this is the sign of the turban of the *dīkṣita*. He holds a bow with three arrows with leather quivers:[16] this is the sign of the *daṇḍa* of the *dīkṣita*.

While the general aesthetic representation is very similar to the already considered Vedic sources, the text of the BŚS features a major variation which regards the weapon carried by the Vrātya leader: in this description the *jyāhṇoḍa* becomes a *tisṛdhanva.*

Hence, according to the primary sources, the tradition regarding the bow belonging to the Vrātya leader subsequent to the AV can be summarized as follows:

	YV	**SV**	**AV**
*saṃhitā*s			
			ŚS = *indradhanus*
			PS = *indradhanus*
*brāhmaṇa*s			
		PB = *jyāhṇoḍa*	
*śrautasūra*s			
	BŚS = *tisṛdhanva*		
	ĀpŚS = *jyāhroḍa*		
	HŚS = *jyāhroḍa*		
	MānŚS = *jyāhroḍa*		

[16] The interpretation of *carmamayair bāṇavadbhis* as "with leather quivers" is still tentative: given that the possibility of having leather arrows seems unsuitable, is the author referring to more than one quiver associated with a single bow, or would it be possible to hypothesize the existence of one case for each single arrow?

3. The *jyāhṇoḍa / jyāhṛoḍa* in Vedic sources

The exact meaning of the term *jyāhṇoda* was not clear to the exegetes. Lāṭyāyana glosses it as *dhanuṣka aniṣu*[17], a "small bow having no arrows" (LŚS 8.6.8). Caland, indeed, translates it as "a bow without arrow." This choice is not perfectly grounded on etymological reasons, since *jyā-* literally means "string" in the sense of "bowstring" also in the ṚV, where it occurs several times; the same meaning can be observed elsewhere.[18] Kātyāyana's interpretation does not give us any more clues: he notes *ayogyaṃ dhanuḥ*, "useless bow" (KŚS 22.4.11); the commentary[19] adds *jyarahitaḥ kevalo dhanurdaṇḍah*, "the simple stick of the bow deprived of the (bow)string."

The essential obscurity and uncertainty of these explanations forces us to infer that this weapon was, as Banerjea also concluded (1963: 157), "a kind of bow, or at least was thought to be so by the Sūtrakāras." Hauer (1927: 48) hypothesizes the equivalence between the *jyāhṇoḍa* and the *daṇḍa*. Parpola (1973: 41) maintains, analogously, that it "apparently corresponds with the *daṇḍa* 'stick' with which the *vrātya*s are said to beat those who should not be beaten in PB 17.1, 9 and the *daṇḍa* of the Vedic *diksita*."[20]

The *topos* of the unstrung bow can be found in the PS where, echoing ŚS 15.1, Rudra is described as *nīlagrīvaṃ vilohitam*, "the blue-necked, the red one."[21] He is the one to whom the poet addresses this invocation and the god's weapon is mentioned in PS 14.3.7:

> *yā ta iṣuḥ śivatamā śivaṃ babhūva te dhanuḥ | śivā śaravyā yā tava tayā no mṛḍa jīvase ||*

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17 All the quotations from LŚS are based on Ranade 1998.

18 See Macdonell and Keith 1912: 291.

19 See Weber 1972.

20 Note that even the weapon taken by the Ekavrātya was allegedly not intended to be used for shooting arrows (see above ŚS 15.1.6–8).

21 See also TS 4.5.1.

> That arrow of yours is most benign; your bow has become benign. Benign is that shot of yours. Show us kindness with it, for the sake of life.[22]

The prayer to the "benign," "not frightful," "not evil-looking" form of the god is taken up in PS 14.4.2:

> *namāṃsi ta āyudhāyānātatāya dhṛṣṇave | ubhābhyām akaraṃ namo bāhubhyāṃ tava dhanvane ||*
>
> Homages to your bold weapon, which is unstrung! I have done homage to both (your) arms, to your bow.

The (absence of) string in Rudra's bow seems to be considered an element which characterizes his peaceful state judging from PS 14.4.3:[23]

> *pra muñca dhanvanas pary ubhayor ātnyor jyām | yāś ca te hasta iṣavaḥ parā tā bhagavo vapa ||*
>
> Unfasten the string from both ends of (your) bow, and lay aside, O Lord, the arrows that are in your hand.

The truthfulness of this assumption emerges from PS 14.4.5:

> *vijyaṃ dhanuḥ śikhaṇḍino viśalyo bāṇavāṁ uta | aneśann asyeṣavaḥ śivo asya niṣaṅgatiḥ ||*

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[22] The translations of PS 14, to which some passages of the *Nīlarudra Upaniṣad* correspond, are by Lubin (2007) who published critical edition of this text and its commentary.

[23] The interpretation of the *jyāhṇoḍa* as a symbol of peacefulness was also the position adopted by Falk (1986). Note, moreover, that according to Walker (1968: 56), the bowstring of Śiva's bow, which was known as *ājagava*, was called *jyā* and "and the term *jyāhroṛa* signified the unstrung bow not ready for use." Note that as a parallel of a non-active status on the part of the god, "in sex-mysticism the *jyāhroṛa* symbolized the passive or flaccid state of Śiva."

> Stringless (is) the bow of the Crested One, and tipless (his) shaft; his arrows have disappeared; his quiver (is) benign.

Such a picture of Rudra's attitude is clearly in contrast with those sources where he is described as a violent, well-armed god: consider, e.g., ṚV 5.42.11 *sviṣúḥ sudhánvā* "the one of good arrow, of good bow."[24] However, the god's "peaceful" state when he is invited by the poet to accept the oblation can also be observed in TS 1.8.6:

> *eṣá te rudra bhāgás táṃ juṣasva ténāvaséna paró mū́javató 'tīhi | ávatat-adhanvā pínākahastaḥ kṛ́ttivāsāḥ ||*
>
> This is thy portion, O Rudra; rejoice in it; with it for food, do thou go away beyond the Mujavants with unstrung bow, thy club in thy hand, clad in skins.[25]

The perspective of a bow with a loosened string, and which is associated in Vedic literature with Rudra in a calm or even in a defeated condition (consider the *pravargya*'s paradigm-myth referenced in af Edholm 2021), is completely different from the description of the Vrātyas summarized by Choudhary (1964: 114). According to that description, the Vrātyas "carried a whip in their hands and a small bow without arrow by which they made depredations and troubled the people." Status of such a weapon, described ibid. as "not meant for shooting" should suggest, instead, a not imminent violent attitude on the part of the one who carries it, since a non-stringed bow is not a weapon ready for use.

However, the possibility of seeing it as a different kind of armament, as noted above, still subsists, even if the symbolical value of this weapon should not be undervalued.

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[24] Aufrecht 1968. See also ŚS 11.2.12.

[25] Tr. Keith 1914.

4. The *tisṛdhanva* in Vedic sources

The sole explicit reference to a working weapon carried by the Vrātya leader comes from BŚS 18.24, a yajurvedic text which mentions the so-called *tisṛdhanva*, compound translated by Kashikar (2003) as "a bow with three arrows" and interpreted by Hauer (1927) as denoting a special bow consisting of three pieces of wood. From a grammatical point of view, the word *tisṛdhanva* consists of a compound having *tisṛ-* (the feminine form of the numeral three)[26] as the first constituent and the neuter word *dhanvan*, "bow," as the second one. The numeral *tisṛ* also co-occurs with *dhanvan*[27] in MS 4.5.9 although not in compound (see below); now, it is logical that this numeral quantifies feminine items, whose linguistic expression is obviously understood both in the compound and in the syntactic string. The fact that *iṣu-* m.f., "arrow," is in fact employed in the MS in its feminine declension (see, e.g., MS 2.13.12.7) makes this word a plausible candidate to virtually supply the above-mentioned lacuna.

Given that the *jyāhṇoḍa*, which was probably a stringless bow, could be interpreted as the symbolic attribute of a god, probably Rudra, in a "peaceful" state, the same reading cannot be applied at first glance in the case of the *tisṛdhanva*, seeing that a bow with three arrows suggests instead the possibility that it is about to be used.

Before it is denoted as the weapon of the Vrātya leader in the BŚS, there is another mention of a bow equipped with three arrows in the same text, i.e., in BŚS 10.48.49:

> *yo rudro agnau yo apsu ya oṣadhīṣu yo rudro viśvā bhuvanāviveśa tasmai rudrāya namo astu> iti athaitat tisṛdhanvaṃ yācati tenottare śroṇyante tiṣṭhann upatiṣṭhate api vānuparikrāmaṃ <yat te rudra puro dhanus tad vāto anu vātu te tasmai te rudra saṃvatsareṇa namaskaromi> <yat te rudra dakṣiṇā dhanus> <yat te rudra paścād dhanus> <yat te rudrottarād dhanus> <yat te rudropari dhanus> iti athainad ayācitaṃ brāhmaṇāya dadāti*

[26] This is a substitute for *tri-* according to A 7.2.99.

[27] All the quotations from MS are based on Schroeder 1881–1886.

> Obeisance to Rudra, who resides in fire, in water, in plants and in all beings." He asks for the bow with three arrows. Standing in the northern [*śroṇi* (of the altar)] or (suitably) moving around, he prays with the verses, "May the wind blow after thy bow which is towards the east. O Rudra, I pay obeisance to thee for a Saṃvatsara; … which is towards the south… for a Parivatsara…; … which is toward the west… for a Idāvatsara…; which is towards the north… for a Iduvatsara…; which is upwards… for a Vatsara…" He gives away that bow (together with the arrows) to a *brāhmaṇa* without being asked.[28]

Judging from this passage, the role of Rudra once again seems crucial: since he has the *tisṛdhanva* at his disposal the sacrificer invokes Rudra attributing the ownership of the bow to him.

Textual research shows that the *tisṛdhanva* also appears during the ritual in BŚS 12. 19.115:

> *anvāhāryam āsādya tisṛdhanvaṁ śuṣkadṛtiṃ dadāti taṃ pratirājabhyaḥ prahiṇīti sa yaḥ pratigṛhṇāti mitro ma iti taṃ veda atha yo na pratigṛhṇāty amitro ma iti taṃ veda*.
>
> Having placed the *Anvāhārya* cooked rice (within the altar), he gives away a bow with three arrows and a dried leather bag. The Adhvaryu sends these to rival kings. One who receives these, him he takes as his friend; one who does not, him he considers as his foe.

Notwithstanding the warlike significance of sending weapons to rival men, this passage instead suggests the symbolic value of such a practice where the bow is one of the most important ritual elements.

A role in the sacrificial act for the *tisṛdhanva* can also be inferred from BŚS 18.9.351.17, which describes a ritual procedure apparently devoted to the worship of Indra:

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[28] Tr. Kashikar (2003), slightly modified.

pātraṃ dadāti tisṛdhanvaṃ ca

He (the sacrificer) gives the pot and the bow with three arrows.

Now, since the only source mentioning this same *tisṛdhanva* as the weapon belonging to the Vrātya leader is the yajurvedic BŚS, while the most common occurrences of the *jyāhṇoḍa* start from the samavedic PB, one may wonder whether there are specific traditions and precise implications related to the *tisṛdhanva* within the yajurvedic imagery.

The *sattra* myth occurring in MS 4.5.9, quoted here according to Amano (2016: 45), clearly mentions a bow with three (arrows) even if the word *tisṛdhanva* is yet to be used:

devā́ vái sattrám āsata kurukṣetrè: 'gnír makhó vayúr índras. tè 'bruvan: "yatamó naḥ prathamá ṛdhnávat, tán naḥ sahá=" íti. téṣāṁ vái makhá ārdhnot. tán nyàkāmayata. tán ná sámasṛjata. tád asya prāsáhā́ditsanta. sá itá evá tisró 'janayatetó dhánus. (…) *sá pratidhā́yā́pākrāmat. táṃ nā́bhyàdhṛṣṇuvant. sá dhanvārtíṃ pratiṣkábhyātiṣṭhat. sá índro vamrī́r abravīd: "etā́ṃ jyā́m +ápyatta=" íti.*

The gods sat at a *sattra* sitting in Kurukṣetra, [namely] Agni, Makha, Vāyu, and Indra. They said: "When one of us will first get success, that [will be] common to us [all]." Then Makha got success among them. [But] Makha wished that [success] only for himself, so he didn't share it. Then they (the other gods) tried to get it by force, so he brought forth three [arrows] from here and a bow from here. (…) He stepped back, setting [bow and arrow], so they didn't have the courage to go toward him. He bent the bow and didn't move. Then Indra said to the termites: "Bite at this bow string!"

In this passage the weapon belongs to the god Makha, whose connection with Rudra has already been illustrated by af Edholm (2021). Variants in the pattern of this well-known myth include Rudra himself as the god whose head was severed by the bowstring. Note that the plural feminine form of the numeral "three," *tisraḥ* echoes the grammatical characteristics of the first constituent of the compound *tisṛdhanva*.

The *tisṛdhanva* again appears in a ritual context in TS 1.8.19[29] (see also TB 1.8.3.4), where it is explicitly mentioned as a part of the *dakṣiṇā* for a sacrifice devoted to Savitṛ:

> *savitre satyaprasavāya puroḍāśaṃ dvādaśakapālam ||*
> *tisṛdhanvaṃ śuṣkadṛtir dakṣiṇā ||*
>
> To Savitr of true instigation a cake on twelve potsherds; the sacrificial fee is a dry skin bag and a bow with three arrows.[30]

Note that the condition of being a *dakṣiṇā* is the explanation Macdonell and Keith (1912: 312) give for the term *tisṛdhanva* in their Vedic Index.

The *tisṛdhanva* is also mentioned twice in the white yajurvedic ŚB. In the first case (ŚB 11.1.5.10) it once again represents the *dakśiṇā* for a sacrifice to honour Agni as Indra's main helper when he defeated Vṛtra:

> *tisṛdhanvaṃ dákṣiṇāṃ dadāti dhánvanā vai śvā́nam bādhante tádetámevaìtádbādhate yáttisṛdhanvaṃ dákṣiṇāṃ dádāti*.
>
> A bow with three arrows he gives as *dakṣiṇā*; for with the bow a dog is driven away: he thus drives away that (dog, the moon) when he gives a bow with three arrows as *dakṣiṇā*.[31]

The other occurrence is in ŚB 14.1.1.7, this time with reference to the myth already told in MS 4.5.9:

> *sá tisṛdhanvám ādāyā́pacakrāma*
>
> Having taken the *tisṛdhanva*, he stepped back.[32]

[29] Weber 1871.
[30] Tr. Keith 1914.
[31] Tr. Eggeling 1882.
[32] Cf. Eggeling 1882.

In the present version the god who possesses the bow is Viṣṇu.

The special weapon is mentioned again in the context of a sacrifice, with an overt reference to Rudra, in the chronologically later ĀpŚs 17.12.3 (which echoes BŚS 10.48.49):

> *tisṛdhanvam ayācitaṃ yajamāno brāhmaṇāya dattvā yat te rudra puro dhanur ity etair yathāliṅgam upatiṣṭhate*
>
> After offering an unsolicited *tisṛdhanva* to the *brahmin*, the *yajamāna* approaches [the altar] with these characteristic words: 'which is your bow, Rudra, placed in the east.'

Interestingly, the *tisṛdhanva* is described as the *dakṣiṇā* of a sacrifice also in *Kauṣītaki Brāhmana* 4.2.15, a ṛgvedic text:

> *tisṛdhanvam dakṣiṇā | tat svastyayanasya rūpam*
>
> The bow with three arrows is the *dakṣiṇā*; this is a sign of good fortune.

Keith's translation (1920) reads "of a safe journey." To summarize the different occurrences of the *tisṛdhanva*:

	ṚV	**YV**	
		Black	White
*saṃhitā*s			
		(MS = Makha's bow)[33]	
		TS = Ritual (*dakṣiṇā*)	

[33] Even if there is no occurrence of the compound *tisṛdhanva* in the MS, this information has however been considered in the present chart since the same denotatum (a bow with three arrows) seems to be clearly expressed in the text.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">brāhmaṇas</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>KB = Ritual (dakṣiṇā)</td><td>TB = Ritual (dakṣiṇā)</td><td rowspan="2">ŚB1 = Ritual (dakṣiṇā)
ŚB2 = Viṣṇu’s bow</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">śrautasūtras</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td rowspan="4">BŚS1 = Ritual (Rudra’s)
BŚS2 = Ritual
BŚS3 = Ritual
BŚS = Vrātya’s bow</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>ĀpŚS = Ritual</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Thus, in the branch of the tradition dealing with the weapon carried by the Vrātya leader represented by the BŚS, one of his attributes is the possession of a bow with three arrows. The Vedic corpus shows the ritual use of this element, whose nature and metaphorical significance is certainly worthy of investigation. A positive value for this symbol in the sense of a good omen can be observed in both the KB and the BŚS. As the chart above shows, the largest number of representations of the bow with three arrows is found in the yajurvedic tradition starting with the MS (even if the quotation is in an embryonic linguistic form), where the weapon belongs to the god Makha; it is then echoed by the samavedic ŚB, in which the owner of the bow is Viṣṇu. In both cases the myth is the same; in both cases Indra is the god who prevails (see ŚB 14.1.1.12).

In this narrow variety of patterns and contexts, the BŚS tells us that the *tisṛdhanva* was the weapon of the Vrātya leader: could the general imagery have changed in that passage, and the bow with three arrows suddenly have become a symbol of violence?

An attempt at drawing some conclusions

To conclude, and without claiming to have reached any definitive inference from the textual analysis and the reflections discussed in the present paper, it indeed seemed interesting to take another look at a much studied passage from the BŚS. In this text, where the link between Rudra and Vrātyas is quite strong and probably emphasised in accordance with its internal contents, a statement such as *aindro vai vrātyo māruto grāmas*, "the Vrātya is for Indra; the village is for the Maruts"[34] may represent a momentary settlement of the group after the expedition, and the Vrātya leader, who should still carry Rudra's bow, is in fact associated with Indra; see BŚS 18.25:

> *asaṃjñātam iva vā ete caranti ye vrātyaṃ caranti | sam evainān jñāpayanti | mādhyaṃdinīyān anuvartata aindrāmāruta ekādaśakapālas | aindro vai vrātyo māruto grāmas | grāmeṇaivainān samīco dadhāti |*
>
> Indeed, those who live a Vrātya-life live quite discordantly. [This rite] leads them to an agreement. The cake on eleven potsherds to Indra and Maruts follows the libations of Soma at the midday pressing. The Vrātya is for Indra; the village is for the Maruts. In this way he brings those into harmony with the village.

Such a parallelism recalls the relationship between Rudra and Indra and its significance in analysing the Vrātyas from the Männerbund perspective. Even though Indra embodies the warrior god par excellence, and even considering the many similarities that he shares with Rudra, he nonetheless does not possess the same savage traits of this god, at least within the development of his cult in the Vedic tradition.

Consider finally TĀ 1.5.4–5[35] which deals with the same myth narrated in the MS and offers an interesting suggestion as far as the "joined" ownership of the bow is concerned:

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[34] See below.

[35] Mitra 1872.

tád indradhánur ity ajyám | abhrávarṇeṣu cákṣate | étád évá śáṃyór bārhaspatyasyá | etád rudrasya dhánúḥ | rudrásya tveva dhánurārtniḥ | śíra útpipeṣa |

This is the *indradhanu*, without bowstring; they look at it in the colors of the clouds. It belongs to Śamyu, son of Bṛhaspati, and it also belongs to Rudra: the end of the bow, indeed, (has) cut (his) head away.

The presence of a strong Rudraic element is beyond question with respect to the bow attributed to the Vrātya leader, an association that contributes to the cultural identification of the Vrātya leader himself. But, according to this passage, the unstrung bow belongs to both Indra and Rudra and such a weapon could refer to the one mentioned in the AV.

Now, within the imagery of an outsider god who carries a bow and is then defeated by Indra, the absence of the bowstring in the tradition started by the PB, but also the ritual value of the bow with three arrows, may be a symbol that perhaps not only emphasises Rudra in his most peaceful manifestation, but also the "failure" of this wild, subversive god before the power of a greater one.

Thus, on the strict basis of the analysis of the Vedic sources, it appears that the specific argument referencing weapon attributed to their leader should not be used to strengthen the idea of the violent nature of the Vrātyas.

Abbreviations

ĀpŚS *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra*
BŚS *Baudhāyana Śrautasrutra*
HŚS *Hiranyakeṣi Śrautasūtra*
KŚS *Śrautasūtra* of Kātyāyana
LŚS *Lātyāyana Śrautasūtra*
MānŚS *Mānava Śrautasūtra*
MS *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*
PB *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*

PS *Paippalāda Saṃhitā*
ṚV *Ṛgveda*
ŚB *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*
ŚS *Śaunakīya Saṃhitā*
TĀ *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*
TB *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*
TS *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*

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Vrātya and *vrātīna* in Sanskrit Grammatical Sources*

ABSTRACT: The present research aims at studying the derivation of *vrātya-* on the basis of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* [A] of Pāṇini and on the relevant commentaries, to understand the Vedic usage of this lexeme and to investigate the origin of the notion of violence linked by default with the Vrātya identity. After a general overview of *vrata-* and *vrāta-* lexemes, rule A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati* is used to derive *vrātīna-*, and the relevant commentaries *Mahābhāṣya* [M], *Kāśikāvṛttī* [KV], and *Siddhāntakaumudī* [SK], turn out to be useful in understanding the many nuances of *vrāta-*. The derivation of *vrātya-* appears more complicated; the proposal advanced here resorts to A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* to explain both *vrātyaḥ* (nom. sg.), i.e., the outstanding ascetic mentioned in *Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā* and in *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, and the more widespread *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.). Instead, other authoritative etymologies advanced over this last century interpret *vrātya-* as deriving from *vrāta-* based on *vrata-* ('ritual vow') or are influenced by the late association of Vrātyas with a violent behaviour.

KEYWORDS: *vrātya*, *vrātīna*, Pāṇini, *vyākaraṇa*, grammatical commentaries

* All the translations are by the author, unless specifically stated.

1. Introduction

The topic of the present research is firstly the analysis of the derivation of the term *vrātīna-*, as described by the indigenous grammatical works; moreover, the word *vrātya-* is studied in accordance with the grammar of Pāṇini, trying to understand its possible derivation and, in this way, its final meaning. As is well known, *vrātya-* may be derived from *vrata-* "command, observance," which is ultimately linked with the IE. **wer-* "to say" (Pokorny 1959: 1162). Pāṇini teaches four different rules mentioning the nominal stem *vrata-*; in three of them, it constitutes a semantic constraint for the output of the *sūtra*:

1) The first rule dealing with *vrata-* is A 3.2.40 *vāci yamo vrate* that prescribes the affix *KHaC* after the verbal stem *yam* "to curb, suppress" when this root co-occurs with nominal stems containing the word *vāc* "speech" as its object, and the derivate denotes *vrata* "ritual vow."[1] For instance, *vāc-aṁ-yam-á* "restrained in speech, silent (while observing a vow)" (Katre 1987: 233).
2) The second *sūtra* presenting the word *vrata-* is A 3.2.80 *vrate* that teaches the affix *ṆinI* after a verbal stem when the root co-occurs with a nominal stem ending in *sUP* and the derivate denotes *vrata* "ritual vow."[2] For instance, *sthāṇḍila-śāy-in-* "sleeping on the bare ground (as a religious vow)" (Katre 1987: 245).
3) The aphorism A 4.2.15 *sthaṇḍilāc chayitari vrate* prescribes the *taddhita* affix *aṆ* after the nominal stem *sthaṇḍila* "bare ground" ending in the seventh case, provided the derivate denotes "agent of sleeping," under the obligation of a ritual vow (*vrata*).[3] For instance,

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[1] A 3.2.40 *vāci yamo vrate* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *dhātoḥ* #3.1.91, *karmaṇi* #1, *khac* #38]: "The affix *KHaC* occurs after the verbal stem *yam* 'to curb, suppress' when the root co-occurs with a nominal stem containing *vāc* as its object, and the derivate denotes *vrata* 'ritual vow'."

[2] A 3.2.80 *vrate* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *dhātoḥ* #3.1.91, *supi* #4, *ṇiniḥ* #78]: "The affix *ṆinI* occurs after a verbal stem when the root co-occurs with a nominal stem ending in *sUP*, and the derivate denotes *vrata* 'ritual vow'."

[3] A 4.2.15 *sthaṇḍilāc chayitari vrate* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ṅyāpprāti-padikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *tatra* #14]: "The *taddhita* affix *aṆ* (A 4.1.83)

sthāṇḍil-á-ḥ bhikṣú-ḥ "an ascetic who sleeps on the bare ground (in fulfilment of a vow)" (Katre 1987: 405).

In the fourth rule, the nominal stem *vrata-* is the etymon for a causative verbal stem, provided that it plays the role of the *karman* "object" of the action of "doing"; rule A 3.1.21 teaches the optionality of the affix *ṆiC* denoting "doing, making" after the nominal stems listed in the *sūtra* (among which *vrata-* "ritual vow"), which indicate the object of doing.[4] For instance, *vrat-áy-a-ti* "observes a vow" (Katre 1987: 185). Vasu (1905–1907: III: 357) considers that *vratayati* can also be translated as "eating" or "abstaining therefrom."

Nevertheless, *vrātya-* may also be derived from *vrāta-* "multitude, troop, group, association" which seems to be linked with the IE. **wer-/*swer-* "to tie, line up" (Pokorny 1959: 1151). The lexeme *vrāta-* is mentioned only in two general aphorisms of Pāṇini, whereas it is commonly used in *Ṛgveda* [ṚV] and *Śaunaka Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā* [ŚS]. Mucciarelli (2015) focuses on the occurrences of the word *vrāta-* in both these works.[5]

ṚV 1.85.4	*vṛ́ṣavrātāsaḥ* mighty (bulls) squadrons of Maruts
ṚV 1.163.8	*vrā́tāsaḥ* troops (gone after the horse)

occurs after the nominal stem *sthaṇḍila* 'bare ground' ending in the seventh case, provided the derivate denotes 'agent of sleeping', under the obligation of a religious vow (*vrata*)."

[4] A 3.1.21 *muṇḍamiśraślakṣṇalavaṇavratavastrahalakalakṛtatūstebhyaḥ ṇic* [*pratyayaḥ* #1, *paraś ca* #2, *vā* #7, *karmaṇaḥ* #15, *karaṇe* #17]: "The affix *ṆiC* optionally occurs to denote 'doing, making' after the nominal stems *muṇḍa* 'bald, shaved', *miśra* 'mixed', *ślakṣṇa* 'smooth', *lavaṇa* 'salt, salty', *vrata* 'ritual vow', *vastra* 'cloth, attire', *hala* 'plough', *kala* and *kṛta* 'names of dice', *tūsta* 'cleaning, combining hair', which indicate the object of doing."

[5] The list drawn up by Mucciarelli (2015) was only partial; for this reason, it has been integrated as follows hereunder.

ṚV 3.26.6	*vŕ̥tam-vrātaṃ gaṇáṃ-gaṇaṃ* we beg (the Maruts) troop upon troop, band upon band
ṚV 3.30.3	*mahā́vrātaḥ* having a great troop (Indra)
ṚV 5.53.11	*śárdhaṃ-śardhaṃ va eṣāṃ vŕ̥tam-vrātaṃ gaṇáṃ-gaṇaṃ* every swarm, every troop, every band (the Maruts)
ṚV 6.75.9	*vrātasāhā́ḥ* conquerors of hosts (forefathers)
ṚV 9.14.2	*sábandhavaḥ páñca vrātāḥ* the troops of five kinsmen (i.e., the hands with fingers of the Adhvaryus)
ṚV 10.34.8	*tripañcāśáḥ krīḷati vŕ̥ta eṣāṃ* the troop of them counting three times fifty is playing (dice)
ṚV 10.34.12	*yó vaḥ senānī́r maható gaṇásya rā́jā vŕ̥tasya prathamó babhū́va* the one who became the leader of your great arm, the first chieftain of the troop (i.e., a gambler whose troop consists of dice)
ṚV 10.47.5	*bhadrávrātam* (victory) having beneficial troops
ṚV 10.57.5	*jīváṃ vŕ̥tam* troop of the living beings
ŚS 2.9.2	*jīvā́nāṃ vŕ̥tam* troop of the living beings

It is already evident from the above list that in six occurrences a military character prevails, even though the martial imagery is also involved to depict hands (1x) and dice (2x). Maruts are the protagonists in three of these instances (note that two examples are associated with the term *gaṇa* and one denotes the group).

Mayrhofer (1986–2001: II, 575–576) accepts this second etymology of *vrātya-* from *vrāta-*, while Falk (1986: 17) combines both *vrata-* and *vrāta-* etymons, and maintains that *vrātya-* "member of a group" is derived from *vrāta-* "group," which is so called because its leader adopts a certain "observational" behaviour, i.e., one or more *vrata*s. Candotti and Pontillo (2015: 165–166) are more oriented to the etymology from *vrāta-* "group" on the basis of Patañjali's commentary to rule A 5.2.21, and this is also the starting point of this research. In fact, the word *vrātīna-* is precisely derived from *vrāta-* "group" + the affix *khaÑ* [= *-īna*] with the meaning of "the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n.)." Furthermore, Patañjali states that the masculine *vrāta-* identifies people coming from different castes, who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups, without any ritual implication. On the basis of this definition, *vrātya-* will also be derived from *vrāta-*.

Pāṇini mentions the noun *vrāta-* in two rules, not dealing with the derivation of *vrātya-*, but equally useful in order to understand the general meaning behind this lexeme. The first aphorism is precisely A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati*, which shows the derivation of *vrātīna-* "the one who lives by the group (*vrāta*)," largely discussed in section 2 together with the occurrences of *vrātīna-* found in Sanskrit literature. Instead, the second rule involving the noun *vrāta-* is A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām*, which will be used to account for the derivation of the nominal stem *vrātya-* in section 3.

The final purpose of the present research is to interpret the technical sources on this lexeme aiming at better understanding its Vedic usage and the traditionally assumed association between violence and *vrātya*. What is here obtained is a survey of the changes in the interpretation of the word *vrātya* (with or without a cultic implication) and their relationship with the normative lines drawn by the authors of grammar.

2. The derivation of *vrātīna*

The word *vrātīna-* is derived by means of the following rule:

> A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *...prātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *khañ* #18][6]
> The *taddhita* affix *khaÑ* [= *-īna*] occurs after a nominal base form (that is, *vrāta*) to denote the sense of *jīvati* "lives by" the *vrāta* "group."

For instance, *vrātena jīvati* = *vrāta-* + *khaÑ* = *vrātīna-* (see Katre 1987: 556). It is worth considering that a similar construction of instrumental case + *jīvati* is already present in A 4.4.12 *vetanādibhyo jīvati* [*tena* #2], always in the meaning of "lives by,"[7] whereas the choice of translating *vrāta* generically as "group" is based on rule A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* (see section 3).[8]

Patañjali introduces the comment to rule A 5.2.21 by asking what *vrāta-* means (*vrātena jīvatīty ucyate kiṃ vrātaṃ nāma*?),[9] and the answer is mentioned here as divided into three parts to make it easier to understand the following commentaries:

> *nānājātīyā aniyatavṛttaya utsedhajīvinaḥ saṃghā vrātāḥ. teṣāṃ karma—vrātam. vrātakarmaṇā jīvatīti—vrātīnaḥ*[10]

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[6] In this rule, the etymon of the *taddhita* is not expressed by the usual demonstrative pronoun, but directly by the unique noun to which the taught affix applies. In other words, Pāṇini uses here *vrātena jīvati* [*prātipadikāt khañ*], instead of *tena jīvati vrātāt khan*.

[7] A 4.4.12 *vetanādibhyo jīvati* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ṅyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *tena* #2, *ṭhak* #1]: "The *taddhita* affix *ṭhaK* occurs after nominal stems beginning with *vetana* 'wages', when they end in instrumental case and derivates denote '…lives by'."

[8] A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ṅyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76 *ñyaḥ* #112]: "The *taddhita* affix *Ñya* occurs after a nominal stem which denotes a *vrāta* 'group' or ends in the affix *CphaÑ*, provided that the derived nominal stem is not feminine."

[9] M *ad* A 5.2.21.

[10] Ibid.

> (a) People coming from different castes, who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups are called *vrāta*s (m.).
> (b) Their activity is [also] *vrāta* (n.).
> (c) The one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n.) is called *vrātīna*.

It is evident that *vrāta-* (as a singular masculine noun) indicates primarily a plurality, namely "people coming from different castes," etc.; however, the same word *vrāta-* (as a singular neuter noun) is then employed to describe "their activity." Patañjali concludes that "the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (neuter) is called *vrātīna* (masculine)."

The KV tends to be even more specific in explaining what this *sūtra* signifies and especially what the term *vrāta-* stands for. In particular, after the definition of *vrāta-* (m.), the commentary specifies that "those who live by the labour of their body, those are *utsedhajīvina*s" (*utsedhaḥ śarīraṃ*, *tadāyāsya ye jīvanti te utsedhajīvinaḥ*)[11] and that "their activity is [also] *vrāta-* (n.)." Subsequently, the conclusion of the M is repeated (that is, "the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n.) is called *vrātīna*"), and the KV ends its comment with this statement:

> this (*vrātina*) is said of any [individual] belonging to those very *vrāta*s (m.). It is not desired that [the word *vrātina*] is used in the meaning of someone else who lives by such [an activity] (*teṣām eva vrātānām anyatama ucyate*. *yas tv anyas tadīyena jīvati tatra na iṣyate*).[12]

It is important to note that Sharma (1999–2002: IV: 527) tries to find a possible explanation to these last sentences added by the authors of the KV; he points out that the word *vrātīna-* cannot be used to

[11] KV *ad* A 5.2.21.
[12] Ibid.

characterise a single person who does not belong to a group, but who earns his living exactly by doing what members of that group do.

The meaning of *vrātīna-* as derived from *vrāta-* has been variously discussed among the main commentaries of Pāṇini's grammar, and it is accepted by other later sources. It is interesting to note that the SK quotes the KV in mentioning that *vrātīna-* is "the one who lives by the labour of his body (*vrātena*), not of his brain" (*vrātena śarīrāyāsena jīvati natu buddhivaibhavena sa vrātīnaḥ*).[13] In commenting this passage, Vasu (1905–1907: I: 907) underlines that the word *vrāta-* means a multitude or mass composed of various castes, who have no fixed employment, and who live by violence, or by bodily labour. Here, the author introduces the element of living by violence, perhaps deriving it from the word *utsedha-* in the meaning of "killing, slaughter" (n.); nevertheless, this specific interpretation is actually controversial, because it is evident that the grammatical commentaries have never quoted violence in connection with *vrātīna-*, nor even when dealing with the term *vrāta-* in general. For this reason, a question arises: where does the violence come from? The hypothesis is that, since the violence is traditionally attributed to the Vrātyas (Falk 1986: 29–30), this element is extended here also to *vrātīna*s. However, the element of violence cannot be justified if one accepts that *vrātya-* also derives from *vrāta-*. This topic will be discussed in the next section.

There are two other occurrences of *vrātīna-* in Sanskrit literature; the first instance is still related to Pāṇini's grammar and grammatical commentaries. In fact, the word *vrātīna-* already appears in the poem entitled *Bhaṭṭikāvya* (6th–7th century CE); this work is an attempt to poetically retell the epic adventures of Rāma in a compendium of examples of grammar and rhetoric. The following quotation is from *Bhaṭṭikāvya* [BK] IV.12 that recites:

vrātīnavyāladīprāstraḥ sutvanaḥ paripūjayan
parṣadvalān mahābrahmair āṭa naikaṭikāśramān

[13] SK 1822 *ad* A 5.2.21.

> With his shining weapons raised against those who were vicious towards itinerant ascetics and honouring the *soma*-drinkers and their retinues, he wandered with the great brahmins among the neighbouring ashrams.[14]

Since this is an example taken from the grammatical tradition, it is not surprising that *vrātīna-* is described in the classical way by the *Jayamaṅgala* commentary [JM] (see JM = Joshi and Paṇśīkar 1934: 74), that is:

> *vrātīnavyāladīprāstraḥ* = (a) those who live by the labour of their bodies, coming from different castes and who do not have any fixed occupation, those are *vrāta* (m.); (b) their activity is also *vrāta* (n.); (c) those who live by this [activity] are called *vrātīna*s. '1822। *vrātena jīvati* ।5।2।21।' [teaches] *khañ*. The shining weapons raised against those who were vicious towards them.

Instead, another occurrence takes place in a completely different work, which is not strictly connected with grammar and its traditional commentaries. In fact, *vrātīna-* is mentioned in the *Lāṭyāyanaśrautasūtra*, belonging to the *Kauthuma* recension of the *Sāmaveda*, that is largely dependent on the *Sāmavedasaṃhitā* and on the *Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa* [PB] that has also been analysed. The following quotation is taken from *Lāṭyāyanaśrautasūtra* [LŚ] VIII.5.1 that recites:

> *vrātīnānāṃ yaudhānāṃ putrān anūcānān ṛtvijo vṛṇīta śyenasya* (see LŚ = Vedāntavāgiśa 1872: 569)
>
> He (i.e., the *yajamāna*) should choose the sons of the *vrātīna*s (i.e., 'those who live by the group'), who are warriors and who have studied the Veda, as officiants of the *Śyena* sacrifice.[15]

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[14] Sanskrit text and translation are taken from BK = Fallon and Bhaṭṭi 2009: 60–61.

[15] Ranade (1998: II: 807) translates it as "For the (*Sādyaskra* sacrifice known as) *Śyena* they should choose the sons of the *Yodha* (out-caste *kṣatriyas*), who follow the life-style of the *Vrātas* (out-caste Brahmins), who have studied the Veda, as the officiating priests."

What is noteworthy is that Hauer (1927: 205–206) specifically analyses this example in commenting the derivation of the word *vrātīna-*. He defines *vrātīna*s as those people who live by the work of the *vrāta*, and adds that, according to the basic meaning of the word *vrāta-* as "group united in a holy work," this "work" is defined as "cultic work."[16]

3. The possible derivation of *vrātya*

The second occurrence of the word *vrāta-* in the A appears to be a good starting point in the derivation of the word *vrātya-*:

> A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ṅyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76 *ñyaḥ* #112]
>
> The *taddhita* affix *Ñya* occurs after a nominal stem which denotes a *vrāta* "group" or ends in the affix *CphaÑ*, provided that the derived nominal stem is not feminine.

According to A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ*,[17] these *taddhita* affixes beginning with *Ñya* are designated as *tadrāja* affixes, and they can be used to specifically indicate the king / the chieftain / the leader as a derivative noun from the name of the group over which he exercises leadership. In other words, the name of the group constitutes the etymon of the leader's designation. For instance, *kapotapāka-* + *Ñya* = *kāpotapākya-* can denote the leader of the group named *kapotapāka-* lit. "cooking doves." The hypothesis is that this derivative pattern could be extended to the hyperonym mentioned in the rule

[16] The quotation is originally in German and it recites "Darnach waren die *Vrātīna* Leute, die vom Werk der *Vrāta* (*vrātam*) leben. Nach der Grundbedeutung des Wortes *vrāta* 'in heiligem Werk verbundene Schar' ist dieses 'Werk' zu bestimmen als 'kultische Handlung'."

[17] A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ṅyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76]: "The *taddhita*s beginning with *Ñya* are designated as *tadrāja* affixes".

itself,[18] giving rise to the final form *vrātya-* (*vrāta-* + *Ñya*), which could denote the leader of a *vrāta* "group."[19]

Indeed, all the occurrences of the singular noun *vrātya-* (only found in two Vedic works)—here supposed to be derived from *vrāta-* + *Ñya*—are used to denote the so-called *ekavrātya-*, who is definitely a leader. For instance, the beginning of the *Vrātyakāṇḍa* in the *Śaunaka Atharvaveda* reads:

> ŚS 15.1 *vrā́tya āsīd ī́yamāna evá sá prajā́patiṃ sám airayat*
> (…)
> ŚS 15.6 *sá ekavrātyò 'bhavat sá dhánur á́datta tád evéndradhanúḥ.*
>
> 1. There was a Vrātya, just wandering; he put Prajāpati in motion. (…)
> 6. He became the unique Vrātya, he took a bow: this was right Indra's bow (Neri and Pontillo 2023: 93).

Analogously, in the *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* [J] 3.21.3 the singular *vrātya-*, which occurs only once in the whole work, is used to denote the so-called *ekavrātya-*:

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[18] This proposal is not a novelty in the grammatical commentaries; in fact, in *vt*. 5 to 8 *ad* A 1.1.68, Kātyāyana presents a list of rules containing expressions that do also denote their synonyms and other connected words. He later distinguishes four types, which he proposes to mark with the following determinatives: *s* to indicate the subspecies (in A 2.4.12, the words *vṛkṣa-* "tree," etc. indicate all the subspecies of *vṛkṣa-*, etc.); *p* stands for the words and their synonyms (in A 3.4.40, *poṣa-* "abundance" stands for *poṣa-* and its synonyms); *j* to indicate that only the synonyms should be understood (in A 2.4.23, *rājan-* "king" indicate the synonym of *rājan-*, but not the word itself); *jh* stands for the mentioned terms and their subspecies (in A 4.4.35, *matsya-* "fish" stands for *matsya-* and all the *matsya-* subspecies). These samples are presented in detail in the work by Scharfe (1971: 42–43). In accordance with the previous explanation, it appears that the derivation of *vrātya* from rule A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* could be characterised by the determinative *jh*, since the noun *vrātya-* denotes the "group" and all the species of group.

[19] It is noteworthy that this thesis was refused by Hauer (1927: 8–9), who instead interpreted *vrātya-* as derived from *vrāta-* "group" as based on *vrata-* "ritual vow".

vrātyo 'sy ekavrātyo 'navasṛṣṭo devānām bilam apyadhāḥ

Thou art the Vrātya, the only Vrātya, not released of the gods (?). Thou hast closed the opening. (see J = Oertel 1896: 182)

However, once again the grammatical commentaries are worthy of consideration in order to understand the implications of such a derivation.

The M does not comment this aphorism, while the KV again shows the definition of the word *vrāta-*: "people coming from different castes who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups are called *vrāta*s" (exactly as M *ad* A 5.2.21). KV *ad* A 5.3.113 continues the paraphrasis of this rule, emphasising that the affix *Ñya* is used *svārthe* "in its own meaning."[20] In other words, the nominal stem derived by means of this *taddhita* affix *Ñya* (i.e., *vrātya-*) conveys the same meaning as the nominal base to which the affix is applied (i.e., *vrāta-*):

vrātavācibhyaḥ prātipadikebhyaḥ ca svārthe ñyaḥ pratyayo bhavaty astriyām.[21]

The affix *Ñya* occurs after nominal stems signifying a *vrāta* to denote its own meaning (i.e., *svārthe*), but not if [the derived nominal stems are] feminine.

Why is this affix taught as *svārthe* "in its own meaning" by the KV? The following example taken from *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* [JB] 2.221 will show how the assumed etymology of the form *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.) denoting a group as derived from *vrāta-* is well tuned to the context:

[20] This *svārthika* section extends from A 5.3.1 up to A 5.4.160.
[21] KV *ad* A 5.3.113.

(…) *divyā vai vrātyā vrātyām adhāvayan budhena sthapatinā*

The divine Vrātyas ran the Vrātya expedition with Budha as their *sthapati.*[22]

It is worth considering that in the *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* the above-mentioned instance of *vrātya-* (singular) as leader of a *vrāta* "group" coexists with three other occurrences inflected in the plural form, that is, *vrātyāḥ*, with the meaning of *svārthe*.[23] The following example is drawn from *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* [J] 1.10.9:

tad dha pṛthur vāinyo divyān vrātyān papraccha (…)

Now Pṛthu Vāinya asked the divine mendicants (i.e., members of the group) (…). (see J = Oertel 1896: 90)

Nevertheless, the KV *ad* A 5.3.113 focuses on completely different examples that form the plural with zero-replacement, implicitly alluding to rule A 2.4.62 *tadrājasya bahuṣu tenaivāstriyām*:[24]

kāpotapākyaḥ, *kāpotapākyau*, *kapotapākāḥ*. *vraihimatyaḥ*, *vraihimatyau*, *vrīhimantāḥ* (…) *astriyām iti kim? kapotapākī. vrīhimatī.*[25]

For instance, *kāpotapākyaḥ* (nom. sg.), *kāpotapākyau* (nom. dual), *kapotapākāḥ* (nom. pl.); *vraihimatyaḥ*, *vraihimatyau*, *vrīhimantāḥ* (…) Why is it said "not in the feminine gender"? Let us consider *kapotapākī*, and *vrīhimatī*.

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[22] Sanskrit text is taken from JB = Vīra and Chandra 1954: 255. Ranade (2019: 835) translates it as "The divine Vrātya persons, indeed, caused the intelligent chief to run a race of the Vrātya."

[23] The same expression *divya-vrātya*s also occurs in *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* [J] 1.34.6 and 1.45.1, always referring to the interlocutors of Pṛthu Vainya.

[24] A 2.4.62 *tadrājasya bahuṣu tenaivāstriyām* [*luk* #58]: "A *tadrāja* affix which occurs after a nominal stem, when it denotes a plurality, is substituted by *LUK*, provided that plurality is expressed by that affix, except when it is followed by a feminine affix."

[25] KV *ad* A 5.3.113.

It is already evident from the KV commentary that, if the hypothesis of *vrātya-* derived from *vrāta-* + *Ñya* is accepted, the problem is then with the nominative plural. Indeed, the instances given by this work are *kapotapākāḥ* and *vrīhimantāḥ* (nom. pl.), in which the affix *Ñya* does not appear, in clear opposition to *kāpotapākyaḥ* and *vraihimatyaḥ* (nom. sg.), and *kāpotapākyau* and *vraihimatyau* (nom. du). However, the KV here refers to the *tadrāja* interpretation of *kapotapākāḥ* (lit. "the princes of the *kapotapāka* group") and *vrīhimantāḥ* (lit. "the princes of the *vrīhimat* group"). It is important to understand that, even if the KV prefers to exemplify this plural, which is a *tadrāja*-name, there are still no prohibitions in forming *kāpotapākyāḥ* (nom. pl.); this specific form should be understood in the sense of "group," derived with the affix *Ñya* in the meaning of *svārthe* "in its own meaning."

The SK better explains this phenomenon regarding the absence of the affix *Ñya* in the nominative plural, after presenting the rule and quoting an example of a nominal stem ending with the affix *CphaÑ* [= *āyana*] (i.e., *kauñjāyanyaḥ*). In fact, this commentary states "it will be taught *LUK* [of the affix *Ñya*] in the plural, it being [an affix] of the *tadrāja* class" (*bahutve tadrājatvāl lug avakṣyate*).[26] This explanation involves two other rules of Pāṇini, dealing with the definition and the enumeration of *tadrāja* affixes, and with the explanation of the *LUK* of the *tadrāja* affixes in the plural. In fact, A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ* teaches the *tadrāja* designation for the *taddhita* affixes beginning with *Ñya* (of A 5.3.112);[27] Katre (1987: 556) specifies that "these affixes are: [*Ñya* 112, *ÑyaṬ* 114, *ṬéṇyaṆ* 115, *cha* 116, *áṆ*, *aÑ* 117, *yaÑ* 118]." The affixes are then replaced by *LUK* in the plural by means of rule A 2.4.62 *tadrājasya bahuṣu tenaivāstriyām*.

It is clear that if this pattern of derivation is accepted for the noun *vrātya-*, the risk arising is that of applying A 2.4.62 to the plural form to obtain a nominative plural *vrātāḥ* alongside *vrātyaḥ* (nom. sg.) and the non-attested *vrātyau* (nom. du.). Nonetheless, if the many Vedic

[26] SK 1100 *ad* A 5.3.113.

[27] A 5.3.119 *ñyādayas tadrājāḥ* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *...prātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76]: "The *taddhita* affixes beginning with *Ñya* (of A 5.3.112) are designated as *tadrāja*."

and Sanskrit occurrences of *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.)[28] are taken into account, which regularly denote an age-group of unmarried boys living in a brotherhood regime rather than princes, it should be assumed that this plural form is allowed to be derived according to A 5.3.113, without resorting to A 2.4.62, as in the case of the supposed *kāpotapākyāḥ* also denoting a group. On the other hand, through the singular *vrātya-*, obtained by means of A 5.3.113 and denoting a leader (i.e., the charismatic figure of *vrātya-* in the aforementioned occurrences), it is possible to derive the name of a group whose leader is this *vrātya-*, by applying A 4.3.120 *tasyedam*. In fact, this rule states that the *taddhita* affixes introduced from A 4.1.83 onwards occur after a nominal stem ending in the sixth *vibhakti* to denote "this is his."[29] The classical instance is *upagor idam = upagu- + aṆ = aupagavam* "belonging to Upagu." This rule can be employed to form the plural *vrātyāḥ*, since it is self-evident that there is only a single leader, but its retinue is made of a plurality. This is why *vrātya- + aṆ = vrātya-* used as a plural form (*vrātyāḥ*) can denote "those who belong to the Vrātya, i.e., those whose leader is the Vrātya."

What emerges from this second interpretation of the plural form *vrātyāḥ* (derived from *vrātya- + aṆ = vrātya-*) is the strong sense of belonging of this group, which is composed of *pares* with respect to the *primus*, i.e., the singular *vrātya-* used to denote the so-called *ekavrātya*. It is clear that this situation is completely different from that of the *kapotapāka-* group, where there can be a single *kāpotapākyaḥ* (nom. sg.), two *kāpotapākyau* (nom. du), or many *kapotapākāḥ* (nom. pl.), all of them defining lit. "the princes of the *kapotapāka*

[28] This plural form *vrātyāḥ* prevalently occurs in *Kalpasūtra*s, *Brāhmaṇa*s, *Mahābhārata*, *Mānavadharmaśāstra* and in the more recent Dharmic literature, with an increasingly sharp derogatory sense. As for this semantic shift see Candotti and Pontillo 2015.

[29] A 4.3.120 *tasyedam* [*pratyayaḥ* #3.1.1, *paraś ca* #3.1.2, *ṅyāpprātipadikāt* #4.1.1, *taddhitāḥ* #4.1.76, *samarthānāṃ prathamād va* #4.1.82, *prāg dīvyato 'ṇ* #4.1.38, *śeṣe* #4.2.92]: "The *taddhita* affixes introduced from A 4.1.83 *prāg dīvyato 'ṇ* occur after syntactically related nominal stems which end in the sixth *vibhakti* to denote 'this is his'."

group" in a supposed dynastic system. Here, in accordance with the meaning, it is evident that the zero-replacement (*LUK*) of the *tadrāja* affix is applied in the plural form. Instead, the LUK-substitution has no application for *vrātya-* because the singular *vrātyaḥ* is not strictly one's own name, but rather a sort of title with different cultural implications: *vrātyaḥ* (singular) indicates the leader of a *vrāta-* "group," whereas the plural form *vrātyāḥ* identifies the group, by resorting to A 5.3.113 (*svārthe*), as formed by "those whose leader is the Vrātya," according to A 4.3.120 *tasyedam*.

What is worthy to note is that neither in the example taken from the ŚS and dealing with *vrātyaḥ* (nom. sg.), nor in that drawn from the *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* and concerning *vrātyāḥ* (nom. pl.), is there a ritual implication in the derivation of *vrātya-*, which is specifically derived from the term *vrāta-* (according to the grammatical sources) and, for this reason, translated in the sense of "group."

4. Conclusions

It has been shown above that the term *vrātīna-* is specifically derived in Pāṇini's grammar by means of rule A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati*. This is a very general *sūtra* dealing with affixation, in particular prescribing the affix *khaÑ* [= *-īna*] after the term *vrāta-* "group" in the meaning of *jīvati* "lives by." In this context, *vrāta-* is simply the nominal stem after which the affix occurs, and it is translated as "group" on the basis of A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām*, which has also been analysed in detail above. Patañjali provides a clear definition of the word *vrāta-* (m.) in the commentary *ad* A 5.2.21, as "people coming from different castes, who do not have any fixed occupation and who subsist on their *sorties* as groups," and qualifying *vrātīna-* as "the one who lives by the activity which is called *vrāta* (n.)." It is clear from the M that there should be no other meaning for *vrāta-* than "group" (and secondly "the activity" of that group). Furthermore, the connection between *vrātīna*s and Vrātyas is not founded on a mere phonetic similarity, but rather on a basically shared meaning. In fact,

vrātya- can also be generically translated as "group," since it brings the same meaning of the lexeme *vrāta-*.

As far as the derivation of *vrātya-* is concerned, the hypothesis is that the affix *Ñya* taught by A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām* can also be extended to the hyperonym *vrāta-*. This solves the derivation of the term *vrātya-* from the lexeme *vrāta-* "group" + the affix *Ñya* in its own meaning (*svārthe*). However, a further problem is that *Ñya* is also classified as *tadrāja* affix; it means that the declension of *vrātya-* should be as follows: *vrātyaḥ* (nom. sg.), *vrātyau* (nom. du.) and *vrātāḥ* (nom. pl.), being the *taddhita* affix *Ñya* zero-replaced in the plural. Nevertheless, since the nominative plural form *vrātyāḥ* is attested for instance in the *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* and *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, two solutions are advanced for its derivation, that can also coexist. On the one hand, the plural form *vrātyāḥ* can be derived from rule A 5.3.113 provided that the affix *Ñya* is not used here as a *tadrāja* affix. On the other hand, rule A 4.3.120 *tasyedam* ensures the derivation of the plural form *vrātyāḥ* denoting the group "belonging" to the leader who is called *vrātya-*. Hence, after deriving *vrātya-* from *vrāta-* "group" + the affix *Ñya*, the affix *aṆ* can be added to *vrātya-* in the meaning of "those who belong to the Vrātya, i.e., those whose leader is the Vrātya."

From the grammatical point of view, and according to the instances of *vrātya-* found in literature, this result appears to be the most reasonable way of understanding the word. Other scholars, such as Falk (1986: 17), combine both *vrata-* and *vrāta-* etymons, and maintain that *vrātya-* "member of a group" is derived from *vrāta-* "group," which is so called because its leader adopts a certain "observational" behaviour, i.e., one or more *vrata*s. This definition of *vrātya-* is probably based on Hauer's interpretation of the term *vrātīna-*. He precisely defines *vrātīna*s as those people who live by the work of the *vrāta*, and adds that, according to the basic meaning of *vrāta* as "group united in a holy work," this "work" is defined as "cultic work" (Hauer 1927: 205–206). The cultic implication is provided by the fact that the term *vrāta-* would be derived from *vrata-* "ritual vow." It is evident that the final meaning of *vrātya-* changes completely; however, the general idea these authors probably bear in mind is that of

emphasising the important role played by the sacrifice in the society of the Vrātya "groups."

There is still one last point in the derivation of *vrātya-* which needs to be discussed, and this is precisely the element of violence commonly linked with the behaviour of the group. In fact, it has already been anticipated that, while commenting rule A 5.2.21 *vrātena jīvati*, Vasu (1905–1907: I: 907) points out that the term *vrāta-* means a multitude or mass composed of various castes, who have no fixed employment, and live by violence, or by bodily labour. The origin of violence is probably connected to the term *utsedha-*, that is presented by Patañjali in the definition of *vrāta-* (see M *ad* A 5.2.21: *nānājātīyā aniyatavṛttaya utsedhajīvinaḥ saṃghā vrātāḥ*); in fact, the lexeme *utsedha-* has two different meanings: "the body" (m.) / "killing, slaughter" (n.), even if this second meaning exclusively occurs in lexicographic works. For this reason, and probably even because of the Vrātya's reputation as aggressive warriors, also emphasised by many modern studies (such as the reference work on the subject, Falk 1986: 29–30), the compound *utsedhajīvinaḥ* has been translated as "those who live by the labour of their body" or as "those who live by killing, slaughtering" (Vasu 1905-1907: I: 907). Nonetheless, this second translation is not justified by the derivation of *vrātya-* as based on *vrāta-* "group." Accordingly, this could only be a general representation of the changing society, where the Vrātyas start being marginalised and accused of being violent.

Many authors have dealt with the noun *vrātya-*, trying to understand its possible derivation and, in this way, its final meaning. However, every scholar reads something different in this term, based on the *vrāta* / *vrātya* interpretation accepted by the works they are studying. Instead, according to Pāṇini and the following grammatical tradition, the derivation of *vrātīna-* from *vrāta-* "group" + the affix *khaÑ* [= *-īna*] is provided and, on the basis of such derivation, also *vrātya-* can be derived from *vrāta-* "group." It is evident that the A and the commentaries keep the two lexemes separated: *vrata-* "ritual vow" is found in four different rules, while *vrāta-* "group" appears in only two aphorisms; and they never quote *utsedha-* in the specific meaning

of "killing, slaughter" (n.), which is proper uniquely of the lexicons. For this reason, all these interpretations seem to be the fruit of authoritative speculation lasting centuries.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the derivation of *vrātya-* from *vrāta-* here proposed was already advanced by Aufrecht (1850: 139),[30] who resorted to *Tāṇḍyamahābrahmaṇa* [T] (alias the *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* [PB]) XVII, 1, 5 in order to ground this assumption:

> *"adhāhīndra girvaṇa" iti viṣamaṃ chando viṣama iva vai vrātaḥ sarvān evaitān samān karoti* (see T = Śāstrī and Śāstrī 1935–1936: II: 271)
>
> (The verses, beginning): 'For, o Indra who lovest the chants', are (of) unequal metre. The joined group is unequal, as it were. He makes them equal (by applying the verses of this metre). (see PB = Caland 1931: 455)

The T (see T = Śāstrī and Śāstrī 1935–1936: II: 271) also consider *Sāyāṇa* commentary to this sentence (that is, *vrāto vrātyasamudāyo viṣama iva vai vividha iva bhavati*), which can be defined as a further step in the identification of *vrāta-* with *vrātya-* (and vice versa), based on the affix *Ñya* in its own meaning (*svārthe*), and according to *sūtra* A 5.3.113 *vrātacphañor astriyām*. Therefore, the context and the commentary to the verse leave no doubt, that *vrāta-* means the group of Vrātyas.[31]

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[30] Dealing with the XV book of the *Atharvaveda*, in the section entitled *Bemerkungen*, Aufrecht states: "I, 1. Vrātya. Das Wort ist mir ausserdem im Ath. nicht begegnet. Vrāta finde ich II, 9, 1 „jīvānām vrātam apyayāt", wo es, wie Yv. III, 55 die Bedeutung „Menge" hat".

[31] The quotation is originally in German and it recites "Schon Aufrecht hat diese Ableitung angenommen (I. St. I, 139), und sie ist gewährleistet durch T.M.Br. XVII, 1,5 (*viṣama iva vrātaḥ sarvān eva etān samān karoti*), wo der Zusammenhang und der Komm. zum Verse keinen Zweifel darüber lässt, dass mit *vrāta* die Schar der Vrātya gemeint ist."

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Violence in Service of Religion in the Pre-classical Sanskrit Texts

ABSTRACT: The instances of perpetrated violence represented here in this essay show a sophisticated society taking care of some exceptional (such as saving a widow) or shall we say extraordinary cases (sacrificial practices), that are not a day-to-day practice. Such occurrences demonstrate a responsibility to the society to deal with cases of extraordinary distress of a situation, but they lack sensitivity or compassion.

The sacrificial practices show changes, such as using earlier on, a cow, but as time seemed to go by, it occurred that a horse was used instead. The example used here is of a horse. A prepubertal and just "graduated" Vedic scholar "won" the privilege (in getting *kali* as his "reward" of the last *vibhītaka* nut/"coin") in becoming the butcher for the sacrificial animal at an important sacrifice, in this case a horse.

In the second instance of violence, as for the widowed woman, young or old, an option is offered to her that certainly is contrary to the societal customs especially for women, though in support of survival. Be it the venue of becoming a common harlot. As for "expeditions"[1] of the Vrātyas, and such.

KEYWORDS: *agnyādheya*, Dīrghatamas Māmateya, "dog," Draupadī, *íriṇa*, *keśī maitreya* (possibly Dālbhya), *sabhā*, *vibhītaka* nuts

[1] This term is used for raiding events to supply winter provisions for survival of families and their stock. As there was no custom of storage for cold winter among these people, in contrast to those who are settled and provide for winter situations.

Change in religious and cultural customs can already be observed in early sources extending over a long period. They are known to differing extents but most or even all cultures have adapted and adopted new ways, sometimes erasing almost all traces of certain customs, and then replacing them with new accommodations to the changing environment and other conditions. Yet, certain parts of these forgotten customs may still appear here and there, mostly unchanged. The occurrence of fragments that sometimes appear rather mysterious is often a sign that they were removed from their context, or rather their context was removed.[2]

With the careful scrutiny of many scholars, including Harry Falk (1986),[3] some of the less intelligible fragments have led to a much more comprehensive interpretation of certain other fragments, including those using the word "dog."[4] It was a sobriquet or nickname for people who were dismissed after they had fulfilled the obligation of their traditional Vedic education. In their post-graduate introduction to life outside of their teacher's house or their family home, they may have had to engage in such tasks as becoming a butcher of a sacrificial animal. Many of these post-graduates were also moving around, even in groups, to seek employment as reciters at religious ceremonies in local communities.

A young pre-pubertal lad just graduating from his Vedic studies may have been chosen to participate in rituals including the sacrificial killing of animals, including the most valuable, such as horses and

2 On the topic see Harzer 2023.

3 Falk 1986 compiled and elaborated on many instances of changes in sacrificial and other procedures as well as customs, such as he noted that with time, that no longer it was the case that a cow was sacrificed at the *agnyādheya*, rather as we will see in an example below, it will be a horse.

4 See, for example, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1.12.1–5, where dogs are singing for their food. A white dog and a group of dogs approached the speaker, from context it was most likely Dālbhya, to get some food; he promised to bring some the next day and the next morning the dogs sang for the food. These "dogs" might be likely former agents in the sacrificial feasts, surviving in their "exile." As for a survey of the dog-imagery used in the Indian tradition and compared with other cultures, see also White 1991.

cows. The graduates would be subjected to playing a "dice" game, with *vibhītaka* nuts.[5] The number of the nuts (sometimes 150, other times a different amount) were already placed in a hollow for each participant to pick up a handful. When the nuts picked up were of an even number, that was considered a fortunate position to be in. In contrast, if the last participant ended up with just one nut, called *kali,* that would be a frightening moment for this young person, as he would be the designated butcher at the given ceremony. Further, after performing his task, he would be dismissed in one of two quite different possible ways: one, killed, or two, maybe exiled, if he were lucky enough. That said, since there seems to be only one butcher at a given event, the rest of the cohort may become performers at various religious events as just mentioned above. At times we learn also about travelling performers for wedding, birth, name-giving, and as well as death ceremonies.

The task for the butcher involved killing and dismembering the sacrificial animal, either a cow or a horse. Harry Falk chose two passages from Wilhelm Caland's *Vādhūla Sūtra* (3.94 or 3.96).[6] In 3.94, there is a young teenager of a respected Sūta, who must be pre-pubertal. He is decorated as a dissector of a horse, crying as someone who is going to die. Dīrghatamas Māmateya[7] heard him and asked: "Who is it who is crying like somebody who will die, whose head will fall off. I will teach you, so your head will not fall off." "Yes, please sir!" He responded, "I will teach how to do this task. Your head will not fall off." Then others come by to see what is going on, asking "Why do

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5 See Harzer 2019.

6 *Vādhūla Śrautasūtra* belongs to *Black Yajurveda* and *Vādhūla Gṛhyasūtra* to *White Yajurveda*. Caland (1923, 1924, 1926, 1928) does not distinguish between *Vādhūla Śrautasūtra* or *Vādhūla Gṛhyasūtra* in the titles of his articles and refers to them as *Vādhūlasūtra*. It is Helmuth von Glasenapp (1929), who produces tables of the various *sūtra*s in his book.

7 Dīrghatamas is literally "he who has a long darkness," meaning that he is blind. A *ṛṣi* called with this name appears in texts from *Ṛgveda* to *Mahābhārata*, which is a long time between these two documents of religious, social, poetic, cultural and political background offering insights extremely important for understanding the early development of history in South Asia.

you torment the horse?" Saying this, the person inquiring will take over and his head will fall off.[8]

It is not that we only observe one kind of violence (i.e., the killing of animals for sacrifice). We could ask: is not it a violence that the pre-pubescent young teenager was submitted to becoming a butcher without a consideration of destroying a young life, already well prepared to support himself and his future family in the service to the society, either as a teacher of the traditional education or performing religious services in the society?

There are other instances which can be labelled "violent acts." A different example of violence was perpetrated against women in an awkward position, namely, when they suddenly became widowed, found themselves unsupported, and had no means to survive.

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[8] Falk 1986: 160–161. On these two pages Harry Falk gives quotes from Wilhelm Caland's and discusses them, as well as suggests changes of the translation and interpretation of several parts of the *Vādhūla Sūtra* (3.94). The paraphrased text above is only a fraction of it, though the full footnote of the Sanskrit text follows here:

> *athāto viśasanasyaivānayanty etaṁ sūtaśreṣṭhasya putraṃ kumāram asiktaretasam aśvasya viśasitāram alaṃkṛtya rudanto yathā mariṣyantam evaṃ yo ha smeti āhur etasya purā prathama āchyati mūrdhā ha smāsya vipat[iṣy] atīti. tad dhaitad keśī maitreyo yatrāśvamedheneje tad dhaikayāvnaḥ kāndamasya pitāmahaṃ vā prapitāmahaṃ vodāninyuḥ kumāram asiktaretasam aśvasya viśasitāram alaṃkṛtya rudanto yathā mariṣyantam evaṃ, tad u ha dīrghatamo māmateya upaśuśrāva; sa hovāca kiṃ etad rudanti ka eṣa ghoṣa iti; taṃ hocur bhagavān asīttham itthaṃ sūtaśreṣṭasya putram udānayanti kumāram asiktaretasam aśvasya viśasitāram alaṃkṛtya rudanto yathā mariśyantam evaṃ; tasya mūrdhā vipatiṣyati tad etad rudanti, sa eṣa ghoṣa iti sa hovāca kumārehi te* (Falk emends: *so'*) *haṃ tad vakṣyāmi yathā tvam evāśvaṃ viśasiṣyasi no te mūrdha vipatiṣyatīti. tathā bhagava iti.* (*sa*) *etad ṣaḍṛcaṃ sūktaṃ provācottarato 'śvasyopaviśyāsiphalakenāsipathān āpiṃśann assai kas tvā chyati kas tvā viśāstīti. tam u tvānya upanikramya kumāra kim idam aśvaṃ kliśnann āssa itthaṃ vā aśvaṃ viśasiṣyatīty* (Falk emends: *viśasiṣyasīty*) *asim ādāyācchāsyasīti* (Falk emends: *ācchāsyati*) *tasya ha mūrdhā vipatiṣyatīti. sa haivaṃ cakāra. tam u hānya upanikramyovāca kumāra kim idam aśvaṃ kliśnann āssa itthaṃ vā aśvaṃ viśasiṣyatīti asiṃ ādāyācachau. tasya ha mūrdhā vipapāta. tan nu haitad evam eva kuryāt.*

There was a stump in the gathering hall (*sabhā*), which was used in a variety of ways, from ancient times. It was used in social, civic, and religious events. This paper examines some of the ancient activities in this *sabhā*, apart from being used for gatherings on various occasions, such as playing games, or drinking, sexual activities, and still others, such as taking care of a sick child.

The *sabhā* was also a place for cremating the dead (Falk 1986: 86), as it was established at a confluence of water streams.[9] As very traditional Brahmans even today apply geomancy, it seems it was a useful tool in early times as well. Alternately, there are other texts that do not support or even forbid the performance of cremations and burials at water sources; rather, they recommend the use of a fertile soil.[10]

In the *sabhā*, the place for games was a hollow, which was established at the water source. This place was called *íriṇa* and was used in resolving certain situations, such as that of a young woman without brothers, who still could obtain some support to survive.[11] In the case of a young widow who did not have any sons, she was able to secure some resources for the last rites of her husband. She sat down on the stump and was pummeled with a die. Thus, she obtained an inheritance.

Uṣas (Dawn) was described as revealing her beautiful body, as if she wanted to attract men.[12] Just as a woman from the South would sit down on the grave, here Uṣas sat down on the stump, symbolizing here

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9 See, for example, *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtram* 4.1.14.

10 Pischel in the context of *íriṇa* (*Ṛgveda* 8.4.3, 8.87.1 and 8.87.4) posits that the phrase *apā kṛtam* added to *íriṇa* can be considered as a place, which at times is waterless. Other scholars, such as Ludwig (*Ṛgveda* 7.4.61) understood as such, though interestingly without consideration that lightening is not always accompanied by rain.
Other sources, examined by Pischel, such as Sāyaṇa: describes *íriṇa* as turfless, holding salt and as dryland. The last mentioning is supported by *Śaunaka Atharvaveda* 4.15.12.

11 See Pischel 1897: 222–225.
According to Monier-Williams Dictionary, in the *Ṛgveda*, *íriṇa* denotes a "water source" or "spring" and in *Atharvaveda*, "a hole."

12 Falk 1986: 87. Here Falk disregards the erotic description of Uṣas.

a grave with the ashes of those cremated. As a woman without brothers turning to men for the ritual for progeny and for a symbolic clump of soil for the burial. A comparison is made with a woman from the South who had sat down on the grave to procure some property. A woman who did not have any male family members who could perform the last rites for her, because if she could not obtain any means to survive, it seems like she could be killed or become a prostitute (*puṃścalī*).[13]

As already mentioned, the stump/post, indicates a grave in the *sabhā*. It had to be covered in its lower part, because that part was in touch with some of those dead (presumably the ashes of the dead) underneath the stump.

Some correlatives can be found in the *Mahābhārata*, yet also in modern times, such as in particular the work of Madeleine Biardeau. In her book "Histoires de poteaux…" ("Stories about Posts…"), she studied a great variety of uses, but many of the instances involving posts seem parallel, with one main difference that they were or are in the open air and in public.[14]

The *Mahābhārata* epic depicted events of the time when the two sets of cousins, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas were contesting, which was leading to the war between them. Here, both sides of cousins would not only be about the gaming to resolve a dispute, a sudden focus on adding humiliation on the Pāṇḍavas was by dragging in their common wife, figuratively as well as literally. Draupadī was known to have had five husbands. Hence, the question or concern about being supported did not apply, and yet she became a subject to very shameful behavior: being dragged to the assembly (*sabhā*), where women customarily did not have access, especially not being properly escorted, plus not dressed. She was dragged in by an attendant on the command of the Kauravas, the cousins of the Pāṇḍavas, who tried to use her as a kind of peon, humiliating not only her, but all the Pāṇḍavas.[15]

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[13] *Puṃścalī* was a female accompaniment to the *Vrātyas* on their expeditions.

[14] Biardeau 1989, translation 2004.

[15] On this episode see also Hiltebeitel 1980; 1981; Vassilkov 1989–1990. *Mahābhārata* 2.27.59.1–2.27.60. All references to *Mahābhārata* are based on Sukthankar et al's edition (*Mahābhārata* 1933–1966) unless otherwise stated.

The *sabhā* was a public venue, and dragging Draupadī during her monthly period and half-dressed, and then being publicly disrobed, would constitute public shaming. This humiliation is to be understood as Draupadī's religious degradation, as the *sabhā* served numerous activities, including sexual, as already mentioned above. Indeed, hers is not such a direct example of violence in service of religion, but she has become an object of violence, tainting or smearing her in such a way that she may not fully recover from such acts that deprive her from relying on religious protection. Even though there are instances later on, in which she does get divine protection.

Although not a similar instance to Draupadī's, but symbolic action of the use of the slab of stone, being observed in the narrative of Damayantī, trying to save her husband Nala.[16] While she was roaming in her search for him, she rested on a slab of stone / stump.[17] The stump can appear to be a symbol of relief from pain, possibly that not much might happen, while a woman sat on a stump with a certain symbolism, mentioned above as providing some relief. Damayantī experienced extreme hardships in the forest being clothed only in a piece of torn off fabric, of which the other part was taken by her departing husband.

In this sampling of different scenarios of violence over a fairly long period of time since several centuries BCE into the early centuries CE of pre-classical period in North and Northwest of the peninsula, we can observe that so many instances of violence were not considered as violence *per se*, as in such cases of the freshly graduated teenager mentioned at the beginning of the essay, as it was a matter of tradition.

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[16] Narrative occurring in the *Mahābhārata* 3. The Forest Book. 61.1. van Buitenen translates "stone slab." Damayantī rested on it. It resonates with the depiction of the behavior of women from the South, when in times of loss of their husbands.

[17] The comparison of the situation of the two women here is not identical, but it is possible to see correspondence in purpose, if not semblance of the material of the piece of support in question. It is possible to see the difference in the material given to the different circumstances, one being an early Vedic practice in a possibly lowland at a river and the other post-Vedic in the Vindhya hills.

As for the fate of women who may not have had any means to live on, after their husband passed away, the choices were not compassionate. As culture commanded for women to be completely dependent on the male members of the family, there were hardly any solutions. And in the matter of survival of a widow without brothers, who would support a woman who lost her husband, there were some hard choices conducted in the *sabhā.*

As mentioned above that both samples discussed, were not considered acts of violence at the time they occurred. And yet, subsequently we find erasures and attitudes changing towards these practices as they are replaced by new offerings with the substitution of certain aspects. One concrete example could be seen in replacing meat with a vegetarian morsel of rice, at important religious ceremonies.

The sources used for this study did not always open up sufficiently to observe the full content of the narrative. It may not be a surprise to learn that some parts may have been removed and as such it becomes difficult to assess what is happening. Hence narratives offer a certain amount transparency to weave together a more comprehensive story. From the *Ṛgveda* to the *Mahābhārata* and beyond, there are still many narratives to be excavated to be sure what the whole performance entails. We already think we know, but that is not fully disclosed.

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Cannibalism in the *dīkṣā* Chapter of the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*

ABSTRACT: This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *Veda*s by examining newly discovered descriptions in the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* III 6.6. This passage appears to contain fairly specific points that ancient practitioners were meant to consider when engaging in cannibalism, points that are not found elsewhere. *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* III 6 is a chapter about the purification (*dīkṣā*) of the sacrificer before the *soma* ritual, repeatedly emphasizing sacrificer's transformation into a suitable sacrificial victim. By compiling and examining such descriptions, the paper demonstrates how concerns related to human sacrifice were deeply embedded in the *dīkṣā* rite of the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*.

KEYWORDS: cannibalism, *Veda*, *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*, *dīkṣā*, *dīkṣita*

1. Human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *Veda*s

In numerous ancient civilizations, the practice of cannibalism and human sacrifice is well-documented. While the significance and underlying reasons for these practices may vary, they often involved a delicate interplay between cultural taboos and motivations. In the ancient Indian Vedic literature, there are references to human sacrifice, but

these appear to be more mythical or ideological rather than accounts of actual rituals. Assuming the practice of human sacrifice did occur, the presence of strong taboos likely hindered clear and explicit descriptions, making it a challenging aspect of study.

The topic of human sacrifice and cannibalism in the *Veda*s has been discussed by scholars since at least the nineteenth century, with figures such as Colebrooke (1805) and Weber (1868) offering their perspectives. Parpola (2007) has comprehensively reviewed and examined previous research. As these studies have pointed out, the *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* contains myths related to human sacrifice, namely in the story of Śunaḥśepa, while the *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, although debated as to their symbolic nature, include chapters dealing with *puruṣamedha* ("human sacrifice").[1] However, the older ritual literature, the *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitā*s, lacks corresponding myths or ritual descriptions. The only description of human sacrifice or consumption of human flesh in the *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitā*s is a short passage in the *sattra* chapter of the *Kāṭhaka-Saṁhitā* (KS), and the *Taittirīya-Saṁhitā* (TS) parallel references it for counterargument.[2] Consequently, it has been challenging to determine whether human sacrifice was an enduring part of the ancient Vedic tradition, and the lack of continuous historical records presents a persistent challenge in the study of human sacrifice.

To approach this challenging question even to a limited extent, it is necessary to find and accumulate descriptions that may suggest actual human sacrifice and cannibalism. The author has found a suggestive description of cannibalism in one of the *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitā*s, the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* (MS). This is in MS III 6.6, in the chapter concerning *dīkṣā* (purification of the sacrificer) as part of the preparations for the *soma* ritual. The purification of the sacrificer is intended to prepare him ritualistically to perform the ritual, but also to turn him

[1] *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* 7.13–18; *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.1–19; *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* 13.6.1–2. Cf. also Bakker 2007.

[2] KS 34.2; see 2.2 below.

into an offering. This description is believed to reflect concerns associated with human sacrifice, a point discussed by Oshima (2010–2011). The potentially suggestive description of cannibalism in MS III 6.6 is to be found in the passage where the sacrificer as *dīkṣita* (one who is purified by *dīkṣā*) becomes the offering himself. This is a particularly complex passage that requires careful interpretation. It will be examined in section 2.1 below.

This passage appears to contain fairly specific points for ancient Vedic practitioners to consider when engaging in cannibalism, points that are not found elsewhere. They are unique to the MS and entirely absent in the parallel of the KS and the TS. In this passage, the word *asuryà-* ("Asuric deed") seems to denote human sacrifice. This term will be further explored alongside KS 34 in section 2.2. KS 34 is a scene from the *dvādaśāha* ("twelve-day" ritual), the concluding ritual of the one-year *sattra*, which Falk (1986, 38f.) has examined for descriptions of human sacrifice and cannibalism.

The term *puruṣamedhá-* occurs only once in the MS:

> *áśānto vấ eṣó 'prītaḥ. puruṣamedhấṁ vấ eṣá prátīkṣate yájamānam evá havyám.* (…) *agnihotrahávaṇīṃ pratápya hásto 'vadhéyo, hásto vā pratápyāgnihotrahávaṇyām avadhéyas. ténaiváinaṁ śamayati. téna prīṇāti.*[3]
>
> This (Agni = Rudra) is not appeased, not satisfied[4]. He longs for a human sacrifice, for the sacrificer as the oblation. (…) After heating the [spoon] for pouring the agnihotra [milk], one should either place his hand beneath it, or, after heating the hand, place it under the [spoon] for pouring the agnihotra [milk]; thereby, he (the sacrificer) appeases him (Agni = Rudra), thereby, he satisfies him.

In this passage, Rudra, appearing as Agni (the sacrificial fire), is said to seek human sacrifice because he has had no share in the *agnihotra*

[3] MS I 8.5(5): 122.2–6, translated in Amano 2009: 299.

[4] All the translations are made by the author of the article.

ritual. By heating the spoon and placing his hand underneath, or by heating his hand and then putting it under the spoon, the sacrificer is substituting for the *puruṣamedhá-* and thereby satisfying Rudra. Therefore, this passage is not understood as a description of an actual practice of human sacrifice. Apart from this instance, the term *puruṣamedhá-* is not used elsewhere in the MS or in the other *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitā*s.

However, the use of *púruṣa-* ("human") and *médha-* ("sacrifice") in the same sentence is found several times in MS III 6, the chapter on *dīkṣā*, and it can be interpreted as implying *puruṣamedhá-*. Although *púruṣa-* and *médha-* are not rare vocabulary words on their own, instances for the use of both together in the same sentence appear only in MS III 6 but nowhere else in the MS. Furthermore, the identification of *dīkṣitá-* ("the purified sacrificer") with *havís-* ("the oblation") in MS III 6 may also be indicative of the theme of human sacrifice. In section 3, I will introduce descriptions containing *púruṣa-* with *médha-* as well as *dīkṣitá-* with *havís-* and *médhya-* ("suitable for sacrifice") to provide further insight.

2. The description of possible cannibalism

2.1 The description of possible cannibalism in MS III 6.6

ā́hitāgnir vā́ eṣá sán $^{+}$*nā́gnihotrā́ṃ*[5] *juhóti, ná darśapūrṇamāsáu yajate.* [66.13] *tád, yā́ āhutibhā́jo devátās, tā́ anudhyāyínīḥ karoti. karśáyata ātmā́naṃ*[66.14]*. ténaivā́sya tád dhutáṃ bhavati. devā́ ásurān* $^{+}$*hatvái-bhyó*[6] *lokébhyaḥ prā́ṇudanta*[66.15]*. téṣām ásavo manuṣyā̀n prā́viśaṁs. tád idáṁ ripráṃ púruṣe 'ntár. átho,* [66.16] *kṛṣṇám iva cákṣuṣy antás. tán nā́śnīyād. asuryàm evā́pahate. yadā́ vái púruṣe ná kíṃ* [66.17] *canā́ntár*

[5] So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *nāgnihotráṃ*; cf. Mittwede (1986: 120).
[6] So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *hatváibhyo*.

bhávati, yadā́sya kṛṣṇáṃ cákṣuṣor náśyaty, átha médhyo. yádi kuryā́n, náktam [66.18] *kuryād. asuryò vái rā́trir.* +*asūryám*[7] +*evā́suryàṃ*[8] *kriyate.*[9]

This one (the *dīkṣita*), although he is an *āhitāgni* (meaning one who has established his own sacrificial fire through the *agnyādhāna* ritual), does not perform *agnihotra* [and] does not hold new and full moon sacrifices. [Hence] he leaves the deities, who are the enjoyers of offerings, wanting. He makes himself lean; thereby, his [*agnihotra*] becomes something offered. The gods, having slain the Asuras, cast them out of these worlds. Their essences (after death) entered into humans. That is the impurity inside a human. And it is also a blackness, as it were, inside the eye. One should not eat it / him; one casts away the Asuric. As soon as there is nothing more inside a human, as soon as the black part of his eyes disappears, then he is suitable for sacrifice. In the case that he does that, he should do it at night. The night belongs to the Asuras; something Asuric is done in the absence of the sun.

This passage begins with the sacrificer's fasting. The sentence *karśáyata ātmā́naṃ* implies self-starvation through fasting, which is considered to be the *agnihotra* offering and a means to appease the gods. In other words, during *dīkṣā,* one offers oneself through self-starvation in lieu of performing the *agnihotra* and the new and full moon sacrifices. It is within this context that the consumption of human flesh is mentioned.

The interpretation of *tán nā́śnīyāt* holds pivotal significance in determining whether this passage alludes to cannibalism. Given the preceding assertion that the essence of the Asuras has entered into human beings, resulting in *riprá-* and the blackness within the eye, it appears reasonable to construe *nā́śnīyāt* "one should not eat" as cautioning against the consumption of such impurity present in humans. This practice of *nā́śnīyāt* serves as a preventative measure against anything Asuric.

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7 So corrected; cf. Viśva Bandhu (1976), s. v. *asūrá-*; Schroeder *asūryàm*. Cf. *asūryá-* in *Ṛgveda* 5.32.6.

8 So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *evā́sūryàṃ.*

9 MS III 6.6(1): 66.12–18. Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 67.

Now, I would like to delve more rigorously into the question of what the object of *aśnīyāt* is. The issue is the interpretation of *tán* (before *nā́*°). If we interpret *tán* as *tád* n. sg. acc., it can be understood either as an adverb meaning "at that time" or "therefore," or as an accusative pronoun referring to the blackness in the eye (*kṛṣṇám*) or to impurity (*riprám*). In the former case, it would signify "at that time/therefore, he should not eat," which would indicate fasting on the part of the sacrificer. In the latter case, it would convey "one should not eat it (the impurity or the black part)," which would imply human consumption. And here I would like to add a third possibility. In the oral transmission, there were no distinctions between *-n n-* < *-t n-* and *-ṃ n-* < *-m n-*, both of which were actually pronounced as *-n n-*, and in the manuscripts of the MS they are written randomly as *-nn-, -ṃnn-*, or *-ṃn-*. Therefore, in this passage as well, *tán* could potentially be the masculine singular accusative *tám*, leading to the interpretation "one should not eat that [human]," which indicates a human in the state of bearing impurity and black color in his eye.

The human becomes suitable for sacrifice when *riprá-* is absent and the eyes are no longer black. The eyes not being black could probably indicate a situation where several hours have passed after death. The absence of *riprá-* might suggest a state where impurities within the body have been eliminated (by some means of treatment?). A human in such a state is considered *médhya-* ("suitable for sacrifice").[10]

Oshima (2010–2011: 67) interprets the state without *riprá-* and with non-black eyes as arising from hunger during fasting. And he interprets the subject of *aśnīyāt* as pertaining to the sacrificer. Following this interpretation, the sacrificer fasts and becomes hungry, which indicates an appropriate state in which to perform the sacrifice (so the passage does not necessarily indicate cannibalism).

There is, however, another basis for considering that this passage is related to cannibalism. This is linked to the meaning of the phrase *yádi kuryā́n, náktaṃ kuryāt* and the meaning of the term *asuryà-*. Oshima

[10] The description urging the removal of *riprá-* that is identified with *amedhyá-* may also be observed in MS III 6.2 at 3.2 below.

translates *yádi kuryā́n, náktaṃ kuryāt* as "if he were to make [the black part], he would make night (*nákt-*)." However, in the MS, *yádi* often introduces choices in ritual contexts, in which case the main sentence serves as a prescription for ritual actions.[11] The word *náktam* in the MS is used elsewhere exclusively as an adverb.[12] Therefore, *yádi kuryā́n*, *náktaṃ kuryāt* must mean "in the case of doing it, one should do it at night." Since it indicates performing an action at night, interpreting the action as fasting does not make sense (because one does not eat during the night in any case). Moreover, that which takes place here is considered to be *asuryà-* ("an Asuric act") in the following sentence. In this context, it is strongly suggested that this "Asuric act" implies something bloody, possibly a human sacrifice.

The term *asurya-* meaning "bloody" is also observed in KS 34.2 in relation to a sacrifice involving sacrificial animals (or humans).

2.2 Description of animal sacrifice and cannibalism at the *dvādaśāha* (the twelve-day ritual concluding the one-year *sattra*) in KS 34

In KS 34.2, *asurya-* signifies "Asuric color (*varṇa-*)," which alludes to blood and activities involving bloodshed, implying a sacrificial ritual. KS 34.2 describes a sacrificial animal for Tvaṣṭar used following

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[11] See Amano (2009: 130–135), especially, "Die genannte Verwendungsweise mit dem präspriktiven Optativ im Hauptsatz ist die häufigste" (Amano 2009: 133). An example of the same sentence construction is found in MS III 8.10: 111.3f.: *yád adhvaryúḥ pratyáṅ dhiṣṇyān atīyā́t, prāṇā́n sáṃkarṣeta. pramā́yukaḥ syād. yády atīyā́d*[111,4]*, yajñaparúṣy átīyāt*, "If the Adhvaryu priest were to go past the dhiṣṇya hearths to the west, he would bind [the part], thus preventing the breaths; he (the sacrificer) would become emaciated. In that case he (the Adhvaryu priest) should go past them, he should go past them in the interval between ritual acts."

[12] In the MS, *náktam* appears with adverb *dívā*, "in the daytime," and therefore means apparently "in the night." Examples for *náktam* and *dívā* appearing together are: I 5.5(2): 73.12f.; I 9.3(1): 132.14; II 2.6(1): 20.1; II 3.6(2): 34.4; III 7.8: 88.1; III 11.2: 142.3,6; III 11.3: 144.3,5; III 11.10: 157.5; IV 3.4: 43.10; IV 5.1: 63.7f., 9, 14. Other examples for *náktam* as adverb are: I 8.6(3): 124.8; II 1.11(1): 12.20f.; IV 2.10: 32.17f. The MS uses *rā́tri-/rā́trī-* as a substantive denoting "night."

the sacrifice of eleven animals (*ekādaśinī*) that is performed in the *dvādaśāha* concluding the one-year *sattra*. Hirose (2024: 971) has suggested the possibility that this sacrificial animal for Tvaṣṭar might serve as a substitute for human sacrifice.

> *asuryaṃ vā etasmād varṇaṃ kṛtvā teja indriyaṃ vīryaṃ prajā paśavo 'pakrāmanti, yasya yūpo virohati. sa īśvara ījānaḥ pāpīyān bhavitos. tvāṣṭraṃ bahurūpam ālabheta.*[13]
>
> Once he (the sacrificer) produced the Asuric color (implying blood), the radiance, the life force, the man's force, offspring [and] cattle go away from this one (the sacrificer), whose sacrificial pole is raised up (i.e., who holds an animal/human sacrifice). He may fall into the misfortune of becoming worse after having sacrificed. He (the sacrificer) should capture [and sacrifice] a multicolored [sacrificial animal] dedicated to Tvaṣṭar.

In the same context of the *dvādaśāha*, there is a discussion regarding consuming flesh of human beings. This passage, as interpreted by Falk (1986: 38–39), is considered to be indicative of the practice of cannibalism ("Hier im Kāṭhakam wird eindeutig von kannibalistischen Praktiken gesprochen").

> *puruṣasaṃmito vā eṣa. yas sattriyaṃ pratigṛhṇāti, puruṣam vai so 'tti. yaṃ khalu vai puruṣam atti, na tasyāsmiṃl loke nāmuṣminn apibhavati.*[14]
>
> This [ritual] (= the *dvādaśāha*) is equal to the human sacrifice. The one who receives something [to eat] in the *sattra* (human flesh?), he (is the one who) eats the human victim. To tell the truth, the human victim, whom he eats, does not have a share, neither in this world nor in yonder [world].

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13 KS 34.2: 36.20f.

14 KS 34.8: 41.16–18. This passage is discussed in Pontillo (2023: 212–215) in relation to cannibalism and self-immolation in *sattra*.

It is clearly stated that he consumes a human being. The *sattriya-,* that is the edible object received by a *sattra* participant in the *sattra*, is probably human flesh, as pointed out by Falk (1986: 38) "den zum Sattra gehörenden [Opfermenschen als Dakṣiṇā]." This is also because in the parallel passage in *Taittirīya-Saṁhitā* (TS), the received object is explicitly mentioned as *puruṣakuṇapá-*, *aśvakuṇapá-*, "human corpse," "horse corpse."[15] The statement that the person to be eaten belongs to neither this world nor the other (but is in a liminal space) may serve as a justification for eating him.

3. The sacrificer (*dīkṣita*) as oblation described in MS III 6 (the chapter on *dīkṣā*)

Here, I have compiled passages where *púruṣa-* and *médha-* are used together, and the sacrificer (*dīkṣitá-*) is described as *havís-* ("oblation") or *médhya-* ("suitable for sacrifice"), or the purification of the sacrificer for being a sacrificial victim is mentioned. These passages collectively indicate that the sacrificer's *dīkṣā* was conducted in a manner reminiscent of human sacrifice.

3.1. MS III 6.1:59.9–12

> +*carúṃ*[16] *kurvanti* (…). *púruṣo vā́ eṣá médhāyā́labhyate; púruṣasyeva hy èṣā́ pratimā́; [59.12] yatá iva hí rūpáṃ. tásmāc carúr evá kāryàs.*

[15] TS 7.2.10.2–3: *eṣá ha vái kunápam atti yáḥ sattré pratigrhnā́ti puruṣakunapám aśvakuṇapáṃ* "This one who receives a human corpse [and] a horse corpse in the *sattra* eats corpse (dead flesh)." The TS views this act negatively. The TS is likely to have a negative perspective on the way the *dvādaśāha* is performed in the KS, possibly because the latter includes human sacrifice, which the TS rejects (preferring to use the name *dvādaśarātrá* instead): TS 7.2.10.4 *tásmād dvādaśāhéna ná yā́jyam* "Therefore the *dvādaśāha* should not be performed." Cf. Hirose 2024: 970.

[16] So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *carú́*; (B) *carúḥ*.

> They (the priests) make a gruel (…). This [gruel] is captured [and sacrificed] as human victim in the sacrifice, as it is the image of a human victim, for it is the form of one who is walking (i.e. a living human). Therefore, one should make a gruel.[17]

This passage describes a scene where rice gruel is offered as part of the introduction into *dīkṣā,* and it is suggested that the offering of gruel carries a symbolic meaning related to human sacrifice.

3.2. MS III 6.2:60.17–61.12

> *snā́ti. mṛtā́ vā́* [60.18] *eṣā́ tvág. amedhyā́m vā́ asyaitád ātmáni śámalaṃ. tád evā́pahate. médhya evá* [61.1] *médham úpaity* (…)[61.8]*. [ghṛténa mā ghṛtapvàḥ punantv] íti. devátābhir evā́tmā́nam pāvayate. [víśvam* [61.9] *hí ripráṃ praváhantu devī́r] íti. yád evā́sya riprám amedhyám ātmáni śámalaṃ,* [61.10] *tád asmād ádhi právahanty. [úd íd ābhyaḥ śúcir ā́ pūtá emi=] íti. śúcir evā́bhyo* [61.11] *yajñíyo médhyah pūtá údeti. havír vái dīkṣitó. yadā́ vái havír yájuṣā prokṣáty*[61.12]*, átha havír bhavati. yád yájuṣā snapáyati, havír eváinam akar.*
>
> He (the sacrificer) takes a purificatory bath. This skin is dead. This stain in his [body] is not suitable for the offering; he he divests himself of it. As one suitable for the sacrifice, he comes to the sacrifice (…). "They shall purify me with clarified butter, those who are purified with clarified butter,"[18] [he says]; with the deities, he purifies himself. "For the goddesses remove all impurity," [he says]; the impure [part] in his [body] which is unsuitable for sacrifice, which is the stain, they remove that from him. "From them (the waters), I emerge pure and clean," [he says]; pure, worthy of sacrifice, suitable for sacrifice, he emerges pure and clean from them (the waters). The *dīkṣita* is the oblation. As soon as he (the priest) sprinkles [water] onto an oblation with a *yajus*, then it becomes a [proper]

[17] Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 62.

[18] MS I 2.1: 10.1 = *Ṛgveda* 10.17.10, *Atharvaveda* Śaunaka recension 6.51.2.

> oblation. Because he (the priest) makes him (the sacrificer) take a purificatory bath with the *yajus*,[19] he has made him into the oblation.[20]

This is a scene from the purification of the sacrificer, where the sacrificer bathes to cleanse his body. In this passage, it is clearly stated that he washes away his stain (*śámala-*) from his body, purifies himself (*ātmā́naṃ pāvayate*) to become suitable as an offering (*médhya evá médham úpaiti*; *havír bhavati.*).

3.3. MS III 6.2:61.12–62.2

> *aśnā́ti. prāṇā́ vā́ áśanaṃ*[61.13]*. prāṇā́n evā́tmán dhitvā́ +dīkṣate.*[21] *suṣiró vái púruṣaḥ. sá vái tárhy evá sárvo,* [61.14] *yárhy ā́śito. yád ā́śito bhávati, médhya evá médham úpaiti* (…). *+ā́ṅkte.*[22] *'bhyàṅkte. vā́saḥ páridhatta. etā́ vái púruṣasya* [61.19] *tanvàḥ. sátanūr evá +médham*[23] *úpaiti. návanītenābhyàṅkte* (…). *darbhapiñjūlā́bhyāṁ samā́yauti.* [62.2] *tát +svid*[24] *abhyáñjanam akar. átho, abhy èváitád ghārayati. medhyatvā́ya.*
>
> He (the sacrificer) eats. The act of eating stands for the vital functions (life sustaining elements). After placing vital functions within himself, he undergoes *dīkṣā*. A human is hollow. At the moment of having eaten, he becomes complete. Because he achieves the state of having eaten, he, being suitable for the sacrifice, comes to the sacrifice (…). He applies ointment [to the eyes], he anoints [the body], he wears clothes. These

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19 In MS III 9.6: 123.10f., the act of sprinkling water is performed on the sacrificial animal, and it is believed to purify impurity not suitable for sacrifice: *paśúṁ snapayanti. yád evā́syābhiníṣaṇṇaṁ śamalam amedhyáṃ*[123.11], *táñ śúndhanti.*

20 Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 64. The chapter on *agniciti* contains a passage where the sacrificer of the *agniciti* is said to have become the oblation: MS III 4.7: 53.18 *havírbhūto vā́ eṣá, yò 'gníṃ cinuté.*

21 So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *dī́kṣate*; Schroeder's manuscripts *dī́kṣite*; see Mittwede 1986: 119.

22 So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *ā́ṅkte*. The underlying is *ā́-añj*. The same form with the correct accent is attested in MS III 6.3: 62.5–7 as well as TS 6.1.1.5f.

23 So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *médhyam*.

24 So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *svíd*; see Mittwede 1986: 120.

are the appearances of the human victim. He goes to the sacrifice with the [suitable] appearances. He anoints [himself] with fresh butter (…). He mixes it with two stalks of *darbha* grass. With this [action] he has completed his adornment. And also he (the priest) sprinkles [butter on the sacrificer].[25] It is for the sake of being suitable for the sacrifice.[26]

This scene depicts the sacrificer consuming a small amount of food before adhering to eating constraints for *dīkṣā.* Here, the state of having consumed a small meal is considered suitable for the sacrifice. Furthermore, it is mentioned that by applying ointment to the eyes and the body and wearing specified clothes, the sacrificer is regarded as taking the form of a *púruṣa-*. In this context, *púruṣa-* does not refer to "human" in a general sense, but rather conveys the meaning of "human victim." Term *púruṣa-* is repeatedly used in conjunction with the words *médha- / médhya- / medhyatvá-*, effectively emphasizing concerns associated with the *puruṣamedhá-*.

3.4. MS III 6.3:62.13–63.12

ūrdhváṃ cā́vāñcaṃ ca pāvayaty; (…). *[vācáspátis tvā punātv] íti.* [62.16] *vācáspátir eváinaṁ yajñā́ya pāvayati. [devás tvā savitā́ punātv] íti.* [62.17] *savitṛ́prasūta eváitā́bhir devátābhir médhāyātmā́nam pāvayate* (…). *yajñā́ya* [63.2] *khálu vā́ eṣá kám ātmā́nam pāvayate* "*// yajñáṁ śakeyam //*" *íti=* (…). *ékaviṁśatyā*[63.11] *pāvayati. dáśa hástyā aṅgúlyo, dáśa pā́dyā, ātmáikaviṁśó*[63.12]. *yā́vān evā́syātmā́, tám pāvayati.*

He (the priest) purifies him (the sacrificer) upwards and downwards (…). "Vācaspati should purify you," [he says].[27] Vācaspati purifies him for the sacrifice. "The god Savitar should purify you," [he says]. Approved by

[25] *abhí-ghārayati* is used as a specialized term in rituals, signifying the act of sprinkling butter onto the oblation just before offering it, completing it as an oblation. Here, the intention is to signify that the sacrificer is being prepared as an oblation.

[26] Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 64.

[27] These mantras are compiled in MS I 2.1: 10.6 and following.

> Savitar, he purifies himself for the sacrifice with these deities (…). In fact, he purifies himself for the sacrifice, [saying], "May I have the aptitude [to be] the sacrifice" (…). [Reciting] the twenty-one verses, he (the priest) purifies him (the sacrificer). The fingers on the hand are ten, [the toes] on the feet are ten, the body itself is the twenty-first. All these parts of his body, he purifies.

This passage involves the purification of the sacrificer with *darbha* grass. Through this purification it is believed that the sacrificer becomes suitable for the sacrifice. In this context, not only the term *médhāya* is used, but also *yajñā́ya* is employed.

3.5. MS III 6.6:67.19–21

> *havír vái dīkṣitó. yád anyátra kṛṣṇājinā́d* $^{+}$*ā́sīta,*[28] *yáthā havíḥ* [67.20] *skannám, evā́ṁ syā́d; yáthā havíṣe skannā́ya prā́yaścittim icháty, evám asmai prā́yaścittim*[67.21] *icheyur.*
>
> The *dīkṣita* is the oblation. If he were to sit anywhere other than on the black antelope's hide, he would be a spilled oblation. Just as one seeks an expiatory rite for a spilled oblation, they (the priests) would seek, in the same way, an expiatory rite for him.[29]

In this scene, the purified sacrificer (*dīkṣita*), representing an oblation, is seated on the hide rather than directly on the ground. Just as oblations must not spill, he too must be in a contained space.

3.6. MS III 6.7:69.7–11

> *yóktreṇa pátnī sáṃnahyate, mékhalayā dīkṣitó* (…) [69.8]*. ūrdhvā́ṁ vái púruṣasya nā́bher médhyam. avācī́nam amedhyā́ṁ. yán mékhalāṃ*[69.9]

[28] So corrected; Schroeder and Sātavalekar *āsīta*.
[29] Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 67f.

paryásyate, médhyasya cāmedhyásya ca vídhṛtyai. devátābhyo vā́ eṣá [69.10] *médhāyātmā́nam ā́labhate, yó dī́kṣate. badhnītá iva vā́ etád ātmā́naṁ, yán*[69.11] *mékhalāṃ paryásyate.*

His wife is adorned with the *yoktra* sash, the *dīkṣita* is wrapped with the *mekhalā* sash (…). The [region] above the navel of a human is suitable for the sacrifice, the [region] below is unsuitable for the sacrifice. Wearing the *mekhalā* sash serves to keep the [region] suitable for the sacrifice and the [region] unsuitable for the sacrifice separate. This one who is purified through the *dīkṣā* captures himself for the deities, for the sacrifice. Through the act of wearing the *mekhalā* sash, he binds himself (like a sacrificial animal).[30]

This scene discusses the act of wrapping the sacrificer with a sash, which relates to making the sacrificer fit for sacrifice. The words *púruṣa-* and *médhya-* are used together once more. Additionally, the act of binding the sash is likened to capturing a sacrificial animal using a rope. The term *ā́-labh* is employed, which is a specialized term representing the act of capturing and offering a sacrificial animal. This indicates the identification of the sacrificer with the sacrificial animal.

3.7 Parallels in the KS and TS to the chapter on *dīkṣā*

In the *dīkṣā* chapter of the MS, there are expressions that include *púruṣa-* (meaning "human [victim]") and *médha-* (meaning "sacrifice") or *médhya-* (meaning "suitable for sacrifice"), implying human sacrifice, and some of these have parallels in the KS and the TS:

chidro vai puruṣo 'ntarād amedhyas (KS 22.13: 69.3f. ~ MS III 6.2: 61.13ff. → 3.3)

A human is cleft, is unsuitable for the sacrifice in his interior.

[30] Cf. Oshima 2010–2011: 73ff.

mṛtaṃ[31] *vā etat puruṣasyāmedhyam, amedhyam evāpahatya medham upaiti* (KS 22.13: 69.7f. ~ MS III 6.2: 60.17-61.1 → 3.2)

This [part] of a human is dead, unsuitable for the sacrifice. After divesting himself of it he (the sacrificer) comes to the sacrifice.

ūrdhvaṃ vai puruṣasya nābhyā medhyam avācīnam amedhyam (KS 23.4: 78.9 ≈ TS 6.1.3.4 ≈ III 6.7: 69.8 → 3.6)

The [region] above the navel of a human is suitable for the sacrifice, the [region] below is unsuitable for the sacrifice.

However, such instances that implicate *puruṣamedhá-* by the use of *púruṣa-,* along with *médha-* or *médhya-*, are fewer in number in the KS (with three instances) and the TS (with one instance) compared to the MS (with six instances).[32]

Furthermore, the co-occurrence of the identifying sentence *havír vái dīkṣitás* was found in two instances in the MS (III 6.2: 61.11 and III 6.6: 67.19 → 3.2 and 3.5), whereas in the KS, there were three instances (23.1: 73.1, 23.3: 77.13, 23.6: 81.4), and in the TS, one instance (TS 6.1.4.5).

4. Conclusion

MS III 6.6: 66.12ff. likely portrays a scene where the *dīkṣitá* as a human victim is consumed (→ 2.1). This description seems to refer to specific practices regarding the human consumption, such as the timing as determined by the color of the eyes, the handling of bodily excretions, and the time of performance (at night). It serves as a significant description with no parallels in the KS or in the TS, highlighting

[31] So corrected; ed. Schroeder *dhāvate 'mṛtaṃ*.

[32] The TS has the following example: 6.1.2.2 *medháyā hí mánasā púruṣo yajñám abhigáchati* "A human approaches the sacrifice with intelligence, thinking." It is not *medhá-* "sacrifice" but *medhā́-* "intelligence" that is standing with *púruṣa-*.

differences in the treatment of cannibalism among different schools. The relationship between cannibalism and the rituals that precede and follow it remains an open question. The consumption of the sacrificer (*dīkṣitá*) seems to provide an inconsistency with the progression of the ritual (as consuming him would mean the sacrificer is no longer present). This is believed to be a result of discontinuity caused by the incorporation of an older ritual element into the new framework of the ritual.

The chapter on *dīkṣā*, MS III 6, reveals that the *dīkṣitá* is treated as a sacrifice, as the words *púruṣa-* ("human [victim]"), *médha-* ("sacrifice"), *havís-* ("the oblation") and *médhya-* ("suitable for sacrifice") imply (→ 3.1–3.6). This trend appeared more strongly in the MS as compared to the KS and the TS (→ 3.7).

In the *Black Yajurveda-Saṁhitā*s, only the cannibalism described in the *dvādaśāha* of the *sattra* in KS 34 was known, therefore, the addition of the example from the *dīkṣā* chapter of the MS is significant. Cannibalism is mentioned in the *sattra* chapter of the KS, which is why it is often discussed in relation to the Vrātya culture.[33] Heesterman and Falk have pointed out a close connection between *dīkṣā* and Vrātya culture, but in the author's previous research on Vrātya culture in the MS, no descriptions indicating a close association between *dīkṣā* and Vrātya culture have been found.[34] The *dīkṣā* in the MS seems to have been a part of the mainstream orthodox culture.[35] The connection between the *dīkṣā* chapter of the MS and cannibalism presented in this paper raises the question of whether it indicates an association

[33] See Pontillo 2023: 212–215.

[34] Heesterman (1962: 29): "there is, in principle, no difference between the vrātya and the dīkṣita"; cf. also Heesterman 1982: 255–256, Falk 1986: 45–46 and 1986: 57, that state regarding PB 24.18 "die Begriffe Vrātya, Sattrin und Dīkṣita untrennbar miteinander verbunden sind." Cf. also af Edholm 2017: 9–11. However, Amano (2016: 63): "What we did not find in the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* is a connection with the *dikṣita-*, a connection that is widely argued for in studies on the *vrātya*s, or with human sacrifice."

[35] About orthodox and non-orthodox culture see Amano 2016: 35–37.

between Vrātya culture and *dīkṣā*,[36] or suggests that cannibalism was practiced outside the Vrātya culture as well (because it dates back to the era of commonality before the Vrātya culture separated from the orthodox culture). Further investigation of the *dīkṣā* in the untranslated MS and KS will undoubtedly widen this analysis.

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[36] Following the description of the cannibalism at the *sattra* described in KS 34.8 (→ 2.2), KS 34.9: 43.3–4 mentions the *dīkṣā* for twelve nights: *dvādaśa dīkṣeran saṃvatsarāyatanās* "For twelve [nights], they (the participants of the *sattra*) should consecrate themselves (perform the *dīkṣā*) when they think annual cycle as [primary] indicator." The use of the verb *dīkṣeran* in this sentence implies the association of the *dīkṣā* with the *sattra* / Vrātya culture.

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Cursing the *daēvas* as an Example of Verbal Aggression in the Zoroastrian "Declaration of Faith"?

A Preliminary Study

ABSTRACT: This article examines the notion of verbal aggression evident in Zoroastrian prayers. Although one may be surprised that a declaration of Zoroastrian faith, called *Fravarānē* (Yasna 12), begins with the words "I hate / abhor / am disgusted" instead of "I believe," cursing (*nifrīn kunišn*) the demons is a pious religious act.

KEYWORDS: Avesta, Zoroastrianism, *daēva*s, verbal violence, faith, hate speech

Relatively new[1] but nowadays very popular term, *hate speech*, greatly mired in numerous controversies, has no single consistent definition outside specific legal frameworks. *The Cambridge Dictionary* defines it as "public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or

[1] "Starting in the 1940s and 50s, various American civil rights groups responded to the atrocities of World War II by advocating for restrictions on hateful speech targeting groups on the basis of race and religion" (Walker 1994: 79).

sexual orientation."[2] It is obvious that hate speech, grounded in and manifested by verbal violence has always existed, although as a legal term it might be a relatively new concept. Hence the question: can we talk about hate speech in reference to religious prayers? The answer is in the negative. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that verbal violence is not a new phenomenon at all. Communications of animosity or disparagement of an individual or a group on account of a group characteristic such as race or religion can be easily found in ancient texts, including the religious.

This paper aims to specific present forms of Zoroastrian verbal abuse using as an example the Avestan "declaration of faith" conventionally named *Fravarānē* (Yasna 12), "I declare" (*fravarānē*— 1. Sg. Con. Aor. Med. of the verbal root *fra-var-* 'to declare myself, believe; lit. to choose for myself').[3] It dates to the earliest days of the Zoroastrian religious practice, but seems to have undergone some linguistic shift and subsequent recasting in the Old Avestan.[4] What is more important, it was probably intended to be recited before an open assembly, i.e. in public (Boyce 1992: 84, 104). The opening sentence of section one and of section four of this text show verbal aggression directed against the *daēva*s, i.e., the ancient Iranian demons. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the *daēva*s are not the victims here but rather the most hated foes and aggressors who threaten and harm faithful followers of Zarathustra. If verbal aggression can be defined as a characteristic that drives a person to attack the self-values and concepts of others by way of defending their own values and concepts,

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[2] Entry: Hate speech. In: *The Cambridge Dictionary*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/hate-speech (accessed 22.10.2023).

[3] Cf. Av. *fra-var-* 1. Jemanden für sich auswählen als; 2. als religiöser Term. techn. a) 'den Glauben (einer Religion) bekennen zu (einer Religion),' b) 'das Glaubensgelübde ablegen, sich zum Glauben bekennen' < *var-* 'wünschen, wählen,' Praes. *vərən-* (Skr. *vṛṇīté*, Lat. *volō*) (AiW: 1360ff). In the F. Wolff's translation: „Will ich das Glaubensgelübde ablegen" (Wolff 1910).

[4] Peterson, J. H. 1997. *Yasna 12: The Zoroastrian Creed*. http://www.avesta.org/yasna/y12j.htm (accessed on 20.10.2023).

we may agree that Zoroastrians do resort to it. However, they use verbal violence to defend themselves only out of fear.

> Rejection of the *dēw*s[5] is linked to Zoroaster's reform, and, as personifications of every imaginable evil, they are mentioned throughout Zoroastrian religious books. (…) The *dēw*s are not simply a psychological or eschatological threat but a present reality in an embattled world (Williams 1994: 334).

It is also worth noting that most of the formal declarations of belief in the world's great religions begin with the words: "I believe." This is the case of Christianity where we have the Apostle's creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty" (Lat. *Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem*); in Judaism: *Ani ma'amin* "I believe"[6]; and the Islamic Shahāda: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God" (Arab. *lā ʾilāha ʾillā-llāh, muḥammadun rasūlu-llāh*). However, the Zoroastrian creed commences with a formulaic damnation of the *daēva*s: *Nāismī daēvō*! "I curse the Daēvas!"

> Yasna 12.1.
> ***Nāismī daēvō! Fravarānē*** *mazdayasnō, zaraϑuštriš,* ***vī.daēvō****, ahura.ṯkaēšō, staotā aməšanąm spəṇtanąm, yaštā aməšanąm spəṇtanąm. Ahurāi mazdāi vaŋhavē vohumaitē vīspā vohū činahmī. Aŝāunē raēvaitē xvarənaŋuhaitē yā zī čīčā vahištā, yeŋ́hē gāuš, yeŋ́hē aŝəm, yeŋ́hē raocå̊, yeŋ́hē raočābīš rōiϑβən xvāϑrā* (Geldner 1896).
>
> **I cause the daēvas to perish! I confess myself** (to be) a worshipper of (the Creator) Ahura Mazda, a follower of the religion revealed by the Prophet Zarathushtra, **inimical to** (the doctrines of) **the daēvas**, acting according to the Law of Ahura Mazda, a praiser of the Holy Immortals (and) a worshipper of the Holy Immortals. Unto Ahura Mazda, the Good,

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[5] Middle Persian *dēw* (invariably written with the Aram. ideogram *ŠDYA*) 'demon, devil' (McK: 26).

[6] It is a prosaic rendition of Maimonides' thirteen-point version of the Jewish principles of faith. It is based on his *Mishnah* commentary to tractate Sanhedrin.

> possessed of goodness, the Holy, possessing riches (and) Glorious do I attribute all things (of the world); because whatsoever things (are) best (are all His). Whose (i.e. the Creator Ahura Mazda's) universe, Righteousness, the lights (of the sky), splendour have blended with (the infinite) lights (in the sky). (Kanga 2014: 329)[7]

The Avestan *nāismī* (1. Sg. Praes. Act.) "I curse," cf. the verbal root *naēd-*: *nāis-*: *nis-* 'to curse, execrate, loathe, abhor' ('schmähen, verwünschen,' AiW: 1034), corresponds to Skr. *nindāmi* "I curse," *nindati* 'blames, reviles, despises,' *nind-* 'deride, abuse, despise, blame' (MacD: 141).[8]

Only after this strong opening statement does a faithful Zoroastrian say: *fravarānē* "I confess/I declare." And s/he declares himself / herself to be a *mazdayasnō* 'Mazda-worshipper,' *zaraϑuštriš* 'a follower of Zarathushtra,' and *vī.daēvō* 'inimical, rejecting, hostile to the Daēvas' (*vī.daēva-* 'gegen die D. gerichtet, ihnen feind' (AiW: 1441), Middle Persian. transl. *jud-dēw* [*ywdt-šDYA*] 'anti-demonic' (McK: 47).

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[7] Cf. Translation by J. H. Peterson:

> **I curse** the Daevas! I declare myself a Mazda-worshipper, a supporter of Zarathushtra, **hostile to the Daevas**, fond of Ahura's teaching, a praiser of the Amesha Spentas, a worshipper of the Amesha Spentas. I ascribe all good to Ahura Mazda, and all the best, *Asha*-endowed, splendid, *xwarena*-endowed, whose is the cow, whose is Asha, whose is the light, may whose blissful areas be filled with light (Peterson 1997),

and the F. Wolff's:

> **Ich verwünsche** die Daeva's! Als Mazdahanbeter, als Zarathustraanhänger will ich das Glaubensgelübde ablegen, **den Daeva's feind**, Ahura's Lehre zugetan, als Preiser der Amesha Spenta's, als Beter der Amesa Spenta's. Dem guten schätzereichen Ahura Mazdah erkenne ich alles Gute zu, 'und all das Beste', dem ashaehrwürdigen prächtigen hoheitsvollen, dem das Rind, dem das Ashaparadies, dem das Licht, dem (der Gedanke eignet:) 'es sollen die wohligen Räume sich mit Licht erfüllen" (Wolff 1910).

[8] Cf. other IE cognates: Armenian *anicanem* "I curse," Greek ὄνειδος 'reprimand, abuse,' Gothic *ga-naitjan* 'to taunt, to abuse,' Lithuanian *níedėti* 'to despise,' Latvian *nîdêt* 'to hate' < PIE *H_3neid- 'to abuse, scold' (EDIV: 182).

The Avestan prefix *vī* ‘away, apart,’ corresponds to Skr. *vi-* , which expresses: separation, disjunction (apart, asunder, away, off, etc.). A collection of late Avestan texts that deals almost exclusively with the *daēva*s, i.e. their various manifestations and ways to defeat them, is titled *Vendidad* (*Vidēvdāt* or *Vidēvdād*), which is a contraction of *vī.daēvō-dāta* ‘given against the *daēva*s’. As Èmile Benveniste (Benveniste 1970: 37–42) first observed, the term *vī.daēva-* (“rejecting the *daēva*s”) qualified the faithful Zoroastrian with the same force as *mazdayasna-* (‘Mazdā worshiper’) and *zaraθuštri-* (‘Zoroastrian’)” (Williams 1994: 333–334).

In the section four of Yasna 12, the faithful Zoroastrian rejects the *daēva*s in public by insulting them (using abusive words):

Vī daēvāiš aγāiš, avaŋhūš, anarətāiš, akō.dābiš sarəm mruyē; hātąm draojištāiš, hātąm paošištāiš, hātām avaŋhutəmāiš. Vī daēvāiš, vī daēva-vaṯbiš, vī yātuš, vī yātumaṯbīš, vī kahyāčiṯ hātąm ātarāiš, vī manəbīš, vī vačəbīš, vī šyaoϑanāiš; vī čiϑrāiš. Vī zī anā sarəm mruyē, yaϑanā drəgvātā rąxšyaṇtā.

I do not accept (or I hate) the chieftainship of the daevas, wicked, without goodness, not going in the straight path, (and) evil-knowing (who are) most untruthful, filthy (or polluted) (and) wicked among the existing ones. Just as I hate the chieftainship of the false (and) tormenting (persons), in the same manner verily hate openly through (my) thought, word and actions the chieftainship of the daevas and of those belonging to the daevas (i.e. of those going on the path of the daevas), the wizards and belonging to the wizards, of any wicked (man) whatsoever among the existing ones. (Kanga 2014: 330)[9]

[9] Cf. the Petersen’s:

> I reject the authority of the Daevas, the wicked, no-good, lawless, evil-knowing. The most *druj*-like of beings, the foulest of beings, the most damaging of beings. I reject the Daevas and their comrades. I reject the demons (*yātu*) and their comrades. I reject any who harm beings. I reject them with my thoughts, words, and deeds. I reject them publicly. Even as I reject the head (authorities), so too do I reject the hostile followers of the *druj*.

As one can see, the believer not only rejects (*vī… mruyē*[10]) the authority (chieftainship) of the Daēvas (*vī daēvāiš… sarəm mruyē*), but also calls them: *aγāiš* (Instr. Pl.) 'the wicked' (*aγā-* "schlecht, böse, schlimm," Skr. *aghá-*, AiW: 47), *avaŋhūš* 'the not-good, without goodness' (*a-vaŋhav-* 'ungut,' AiW: 174), *anarətāiš* 'the lawless, i.e. not going in the straight path of truth' (*an-arəta-* 'gesetzlos, dem heiligen Recht feind,' Skr. *án-rta-*, AiW: 120), *akō.dābīš* 'the evil--doing, evil-knowing' (*akō-dā-* 'Böses, das Böse schaffend,' AiW: 47). He then moves on to abuse them even more, by using the superlative forms of adjectives: *draojištāiš* (Instr. Pl.) 'the most *druj*-like, i.e. the most untruthful' (*draojištā* cf. *draog- draoγa-* 'lügnerisch; Lüg, Lüge,' AiW: 767–768), *paoṣištāiš* 'the foulest, the most filthy' (*paošišta-* 'der fauligste, stinkendste,' cf. *paoš-* 'faulig,' AiW: 818), *avaŋhutəmāiš* 'the worst, the most wicked (among the existing ones)' (*avaŋhutəma-* 'der wenigst gute, böseste,' AiW: 174).

In the next sentence a believing Zoroastrian continues: "Just as I hate the chieftainship of…" (*vī … zī anā sarəm mruyē*): *daēvavaṯbiš* (Instr. Pl.) 'belonging to the daēvas (i.e. of those going on the path of the daēvas)' (*daēva.vant-* 'Daeva-genosse,' AiW: 671); *yātuš* 'the sorcerers, magicians, wizards' (*yātu-*, Skr. *yātu-*,

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And the Wollf's:

> Auf sage ich der Gemeinschaft mit den schlimmen schädlichen gesetzlosen Böses schaffenden Daeva's, den lügnerischsten der Seienden, den stinkendsten der Seienden, den schädlichsten der Seienden; Auf mit den Daeva's, auf mit den Daevagenossen, auf mit den Zauberern, auf mit den Zauberergenossen; auf mit denen, (die) jedwedem unter den Seienden Schaden tun: auf in Gedanken, auf in Worten. auf in Taten, auf in Kundgebungen. Auf sage ich denn so der Gemeinschaft mit jeglichem feindseligen Druggläubigen" (Wolff 1910).

[10] "The meaning of Avestan *mru-* (Skr. *brū-*) is to 'speak'; but when this root is used with different prefixes, its meaning changes: e.g. *nī-mrū-* means 'to request,' 'to demand'; *paiti-mru-* means 'to answer'; 'to reply'; *ā-mrū-* means 'to call, to invoke'; *vī-mrū-*, *antare-mrū-* means 'to abjure, to deny, to forsake, not to accept, to renounce'" (see Kanga 2014: 330). Cf. Av. *mrav-*: *mru-* 'sagen,' *vī-mrav-* 'aufsagen, entsagen': *vī … mruyē* (1. Sg. Praes. Med.) (AiW: 1196).

Pers. *jādū* (Skr. *yatu-dhāna*[11]) 'conjuration, magic; juggling; a conjurer,' PED: 349); *yātumatbīš* 'magician's fellows and comrades, those belonging to the wizards' (*yātu.mant-* adj. of *yātu-*); *ātarāiš* 'destroyers, harassers, tormenting persons' (*ā-tara-* 'Bedränger, Angreifer *von daēvischen Wesen*, AiW 316)." He rejects all of them ("I verily hate them") with his: *manābīš* 'thoughts' (*manah-*, Skr. *manas*, Gr. *menos*); *vačābīš* 'words' (*vačah-*) and *šyaoϑanāiš* 'deeds' (*šyaoϑna-*). He rejects them in public *čiϑrāiš* (*čiϑra-* 'manifestus; Kundgebung,' AiW: 586), calling them *drəgvātā rąxšyaṇtā* 'hostile *drug*-believers' (*drəgvant-* 'der zur Drug[12] hält und gehört, Genosse der Drug,' AiW: 774; *rąxšyant-* AiW: 1528).

In his short synopsis to the Zoroastrian creed (A Short Synopsis of *Dīn-no kalamo*) Kanga explains:

> I am the hater and destroyer of all the daevas, and idol-worship. I am the praiser of the Ameshaspands or Holy Immortals and their glorifier. I am the worshipper of the Creator of the entire world who is Omnipotent and Omniscient, Ahura Mazda. I accept to remove the distress and difficulty from the houses of the Mazda-worshipping people and to protect the cattle and beneficent animals from thieves and robbers. I hate to live under the authority of lying and wicked men, and of the sorcerers. (Kanga 2014: 332)

To answer the question about hate speech in Avestan prayers, we must understand who the foes, i.e., the *daēva*s, were.[13] Old Avestan *daēva-* derives from Old Iranian **daiva-* < Indo-Iranian **daivá-* 'god' (cf. Skr. *devá-*) < PIE **deiu̯ó-* with the same meaning. While the word for the Vedic spirits and the word for the Zoroastrian entities are etymologically related, their function and thematic development is altogether different. Originally, the term was used to denote beings found

[11] Skr. *yātu* m. 'sorcery; kind of fiend': *-dhāna* 'kind of fiend or goblin' (MacD: 244).

[12] Av. *draog-* 'lügen, trügen,' *draoga*, *draoγa-* 'lügnerisch; Lüg, Lüge' (AiW: 767–768).

[13] For more on Iranian *daēva*s see: Benveniste 1967; 1970; Bianchi 1977; Boyce 1975; 1979; 1992; Duchesne-Guillemin 1962; Haug 1902; Kellens and Pirart 1988; Nöldeke 1923; Nyberg 1938; Shaked 1967; Williams 1994.

in folklore which predates its use in scripture. Vedic *devá-* is variously applied to most divine beings, including gods and many of the *asura*s. Likewise, at the oldest layer, Zoroastrianism's *daēva*s are originally also gods (albeit gods to be rejected), and it is only in the later texts that the word evolved to exclusively refer to evil creatures. In the Gathas the *daēva*s are 'gods that are (to be) rejected' (Herrenschmidt & Kellens 1993: 559–602). They are censured as being incapable of discerning the truth (*aša-* 'Asha, the law,' Skr. *ṛta-*; Old Persian *arta-*) from falsehood (*druj-* 'Drug, the lie'). This meaning is also evident in the Xerxes' *daiva* inscription (XPh) in the Old Persian of the 5th century BCE.[14] In the *Younger Avesta*, the *daēva*s are clearly hostile entities, divinities that promote chaos and disorder. In later tradition the *dēw*s (New Persian *div* integrated to Islam[15]) are personifications of every imaginable evil. The word *daēva.yasna-* (literally, 'one who sacrifices to *daēva*s') denotes adherents of other (false) religions and thus still preserves some semblance of the original meaning in that the *daēva-* prefix still denotes other gods (Herrenschmidt & Kellens 1993: 599–602). According to Kanga:

[14] XPh 35-41: *Utâ atar aitâ dahyâva âha yad âtya paruvam daivâ ayadiya. Pasâva vašnâ Auramazdahâ adam avam daivadânam viyakanam utâ patiyazbayam: daivâ mâ yadiyaiša yadâyâ. Paruvam daivâ ayadiya avadâ adam Auramazdâm ayadaiy artâcâ brazmaniya utâ aniyašca âha tya duškartam akariya ava adam naibam akunavam aita tya adam akunavam visam vašnâ Auramazdahâ akunavam.*

And among these countries there was a place where previously demons (*daiva*) were worshipped. Afterwards, by the grace of Ahuramazda I destroyed that sanctuary of demons, and I proclaimed: The demons shall not be worshipped! Where previously the demons were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahuramazda at the proper time and in the proper manner. And there was other business that had been done ill. That I made good. That which I did, all I did by the grace of Ahuramazda (Kent 1950: 151).

[15] Pers. *dev, dīv* (S. *deva*) 'A devil, demon, genius, spirit, ghost, hobgoblin; a sort of woolen armour; a horse; anger, passion, force, violence; brave; stratagem, fraud, deceit; losing the way, deviating, led astray; perverse'; *dewi dīn* 'Satan'; *dewi saped* 'Satan transformed into an angel of light; name of a celebrated champion slain by Rustam'; *dewi shabīna* 'The nightmare'; *dewi shahwat* 'The demon of lust' (PED: 554).

> *Daeva* in the Avesta has four different meanings according to the opinion of Sheth Kharshedji Rustomji Cama, or in other words we learn of four types of dev from the Avesta: (1) daevas having the appearance of man; (2) daevas producing diseases; (3) immoral daevas (4) daevas decreasing prosperity: (1). These persons who produce wickedness by increasing diseases or by decreasing prosperity or by ruining morality, are called the daevas having the appearance of men; e.g. Zohak, wicked people of Gilān and Māzandarān, etc. (2). Those who emit diseases and untimely death by whatever means or objects are also called 'daevas,' e.g. a statement is made in Vendidad frakart VII about some daevas residing in the tombs. Here the meaning of daeva is to be understood as impure. They produce diseases while coming out of the tombs. (3). Whatever incites us to follow the path of wickedness is also termed 'daeva,' e.g., slander, deceit, heresy, evil eye, impurity, etc. (4). Whatever causes disturbance in the spread of prosperity is also known by the term daeva, e.g. the demon Apaosha prevents rain i.e. the causes responsible for the prevention of rain are known by the name 'apaosha'. Excessive cold is regarded as the queen of demons. See Sheth K.R. Cama *Zarthosht Nāmu* VI... "Who is daeva." (Kanga 2014: 10)

In the *Khordeh Avesta Bā-Māyeni* (text, transcribed into Gujarati script and accompanied by a Gujarati translation, was prepared and published in 1880 by the celebrated Avesta scholar, Ervad Kavasji Edulji Kanga), one can also find other prayers cursing the wicked *demons*. It is worth mentioning that the book has remained a standard work in the Parsi community for the purpose of prayers, and among the scholars—an indispensable reference book. In a prayer *Nīrang-ī gomez mālidan*, which is a form of Zoroastrian exorcism, Ahriman the Accursed is called Satan. The *Nīrang*[16] should be recited on waking up to a brand-new day. Composed in Persian, is reads as follows:

[16] Pers. *nīrang* 'incantation, magic, sorcery, deception' (PED: 1441); Middle Persian *nērang* 'incantation, charm, spell' (McK: 58).

Šekaste, šekaste[17] *Šeytān Ahriman gajaste*[18] *kār-o-kerdār, na rasad gajaste kār-o-kerdār! Si-o-sē Amešāspand dādār Hormazd pirozgar pāk. Ašaone Ašəm Vohū.*

(May) the Satan (be) defeated and destroyed! (May) the works and workers of Ahriman the accursed (be) destroyed! May not works and workers of (that) accursed (Ahriman) reach(me)! Thirty-three Holy Immortals (Ameshaspands) and the Creator Hormazd are victorious and holy (Ibid.: 2–3).

The *Kem-nā-Mazdā* is a prayer which invokes Ahura Mazda's protection and compassion. It is also a powerful *Nīrang* which can be recited as a stand-alone prayer. It is next only to the *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* in terms of its protective powers. In this prayer, Zarathushtra asks Ahura Mazda:

Who will give me and my followers protection when evils look at me with the intention to hurt, except Thy Fire (Divine Energy) and Mind (Consciousness), by whose actions the progress of the world takes place. Please reveal to me the religious knowledge associated with that. Which are your words for protection which smite the enemy, and which are for victory and protection. Do show me a spiritual teacher who can lead me to knowledge of material and spiritual worlds, so that Divine Guidance (Sraosha) can come through higher consciousness (Vohu Manah). Such wisdom comes only to those unto whom Mazda wishes and considers deserving.[19]

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17 Pers. *shikasta* 'broken; discomfited, routed; reduced to straits; ashamed, penitent; proud; weak; sick, wounded'; *shikasta shudan* 'to be broken; to be distressed; to be diminished; to become less rigid or intense' (PED: 753).

18 Middle Pers. *gizastag* 'accursed, hateful' (McK: 36).

19 "Kem Na Mazda"—Invoking Divine Protection. In: *Parsi Times*. February 18, 2017. https://parsi-times.com/2017/02/kem-na-mazda-invoking-divine-protection/ (accessed on 12.10.2023).

The following words, found in the *Kem-nā-Mazdā*, are taken from *Vīdēvdād* (Fargard 8.21: Funerals and purification, unlawful sex; see footnote 'j' in Kanga 2014: 3); they read as follows:

> *Pāta nō ṯbišyañtat*[20] *pairi Mazdåosča Ārmaitišča speñtasča, nase*[21] *daēvī druxš, nase daēvō-čiθre, nase daēvō-frakaršte, nase daēvō-fradāite, apa druxš nase, apa druxš dvāra, apa druxš vīnase, apāxeδre apa-nasyehe, mā mereñčainīš gaēθāo astvaitīš ašahe. Nemasčā yā Ārmaitiš ižāčā. Ašəm Vohū.*

> O Hormazd and Spenta Ārmaiti! Protect us from the envious ones. (from here) Perish thou, O devilish Druj, perish thou, O devil's spawn; perish thou, O (evil) sown by the daevas, perish thou, O follower of devil's law; perish O Druj, disappear utterly, vanish and entirely perish, in the North, O Druj. (so that) corporeal settlements of righteousness (may) not (be) fit to be destroyed. Homage (be) unto right thought and prosperity! (Kanga 2014: 4)

It is also worth mentioning here that the Avesta uses one set of words belonging to the creations of Ahura Mazda (the *Ahuric* lexica) and another for those formed by Angra Mainyu (the *Daevic* lexica). The German orientalist, Christian Bartholomae (1855–1925), was the first to reflect on such specific synonyms in Avestan. In his dictionary of the Old Iranian languages*, Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, among other entries he had elaborated on, we can find terms of interest with Batholomae's comments: *von daēvischen Wesen*, or *von ahurischer Wesen.* It is quite clear that different words were used for beings associated with Ahriman, and different for those associated with Ahura Mazda (Gray 1927: 427). Interestingly, offensive and derogatory vocabulary was used by pious beings only towards Ahriman's creatures. So, it was not the *deva*s who hurled invectives against the pious and the righteous, but quite the opposite. The former of these theories was advanced by Leo Frachtenberg (1908: 269-89), and the latter by Hermann Güntert (1914).

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[20] Av. *ṯbišyant-* 'feindlich, feind, inimicus' (AiW: 816).

[21] Av. *nas-* 'verschwinden, sich fort machen, weichen' (AiW: 1055).

So, returning to the question posed at the beginning of the essay, as to whether the believers of Zarathustra used verbal aggression, one may answer in the affirmative. But one cannot call their utterances "hate speech," for the term assumes that such a speech is used by the aggressor towards one who, through this act, becomes his victim. As we know, the original aggressors here were the *daēva*s, against whom Zoroastrians could only defend themselves by way of abusive words. Although one might be surprised that a declaration of faith can begin with the words "I curse" instead of "I believe," cursing the demons (*nifrīn kunišn*) is a religious act (Menasce 1973: ch. 123, 225, 236). "Man's daily duty and eschatological role are to smite demons through good action and prayer" (Williams 1990: 48.79 ff.).

Abbreviations

AiW = Bartholomae, C. 1904. *Altiranisches Wörterbuch.* Strassburg: Trübner.

EDIV = Cheung, J. 2007. *Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series, vol. 2). Leiden–Boston: Brill.

MacD = Macdonell, A. A. 1929. *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary with Transliteration, Accentuation, and Etymological Analysis Throughout*. London: Oxford University Press.

McK = MacKenzie, D. N. 1971. *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*. London: Oxford University Press.

PED = Steingass, F. J. 1892. *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature*. London: Routledge & K. Paul.

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Henk Bodewitz, *Vedic Cosmology and Ethics: Selected Studies* (Gonda Indological Studies, Vol. 19). Ed. Henk Bodewitz, Dory H. Heilijgers, Jan E. M. Houben and Karel van Kooij. pp. 480. Boston: Brill 2019.—Reviewed by Mattia Capotosto and Alessia Manca (University of Cagliari, Italy)[1]

1. This work encapsulates over forty years of research carried out by Professor Henk Bodewitz. It is organised as a miscellany of 23 articles divided into two sections, with a total of 480 pages. After a brief preface by the editors, the first article gives a general introduction to the main topics. The first section is considerably longer than the second one, as it includes 16 articles and focuses on the Otherworld (*Yonder World*) in Vedic literature. The second section has 6 articles and explores *Vices and Virtues* in Vedic literature, drawing comparisons between older and more recent texts. The work includes an extensive and detailed list of bibliographic entries, an *index locorum* that allows readers to easily identify the relevant texts, an index of authors and a valuable general index. It is worth noting that readers can find the English translations for articles 2 (Bodewitz 1969) and 3

[1] This paper is the result of joint work discussed and shared by the authors: for the sake of academic requirements, §§ 1 and 4 are attributed to Mattia Capotosto, §§ 2 and 3 to Alessia Manca.

(Bodewitz 1974), which are written in German, in Appendices I and II. The various articles are all enriched with copious footnotes, providing elucidations, references to other texts, citations from the academic community, as well as terminological clarifications and definitions. All these contents provide even non-specialists in these subjects with a valuable tool for delving into the discussed topics, that is cosmology and ethics, in both ancient and later Vedic literature.

2. An especially valuable feature is the attention the author pays to linguistic detail: each paragraph focuses on one or more specific terms, and their occurrences are recorded in order to define their semantic field and reconstruct their historical, anthropological and philological background. Secondary literature is constantly taken into account and accurately investigated, and constructive criticism is provided—when necessary—on other works and their authors. Although Bodewitz' inquiries engage in a fruitful dialogue with crucial reference works by the contemporary and previous scholarship, such as Gonda 1966, Horsch 1971, Tull 1989, his research is largely independent and manages to encompass a greater number of ancient sources. All in all, the collection could be considered a monograph, as Bodewitz himself might indeed have conceived it, be it a merit of the editors or a consequence of the general consistency of the results of the author's research.

3. In *Yonder World*, Bodewitz mainly focuses on *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (already studied in his early works, 1973 and 1990), but does not neglect the *Upaniṣad*s (*Kaṭha*, *Kauṣītaki*, *Chāndogya* or *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*), or even the Saṃhitās, privileging the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* and frequently comparing the occurrences of the same terms found therein. This gives rise to many questions which the author either tries to answer or at least attempts to lay the foundations for further deep and thought-provoking studies that will allow knowledge about his research fields to be widened. First of all, what is the concept of the yonder world in the Vedas (ṚV e AV)? What is its nature, and where is it imagined to be? And how does it change in

texts, from a diatopical and diachronical point of view? According to Gonda (1965), the yonder world sometimes appears to be a fourth or fifth world which goes beyond the tripartite horizontal Vedic dimension; sometimes, it resembles an underworld, in which *naraka* (hell) is not always distinguishable from what Bodewitz calls heaven. Furthermore, the yonder world is connected to the existence of "pits" which in the Vedic imagination were seen as dangerous gates to this unknown dimension. Its inhabitants include the Fathers, the semi-divine *Pitṛ*s; theirs is one of the after-death paths (*devayāna* and *pitṛyāna*) that bring the deceased to the gods' or—with a minor level of bliss—to the ancestors' world. Of course, as one may expect, the texts seldom agree, and the overall picture is thus often liable to changes. Nevertheless, the author deduces that hell, in its most negative meaning of darkness, is intended for demons and diseases, sinners and undesirable people. As regards human behaviour, the author inspects the role that merits and demerits play in obtaining a second life, be it on earth or not. Bodewitz also investigates the concept of *amṛtā* (immortality) and its consequences, such as dissolution (*mokṣa*) or re-death (*punarmṛtyu*), the basis of the later transmigration doctrine. Myths of chthonic and mortal deities are considered, first of all Yama (chapter 6, Bodewitz 1985), followed by Varuṇa in his most obscure and lunar aspects (Kuiper 1979, cited in more than one article). Chapter 5 (Bodewitz 1983) is devoted to the description of ritual practices and of each priest in his own Veda, with particular regard to the *Brahmán* in the Atharvaveda. Overall, this first part can be considered as a fundamental source for whosoever wishes to explore everything that is connected to the understanding of the yonder world starting from the most ancient Vedic sources and going back to the origins of the later idea of *saṃsāra.*

4. The articles in the second section (*Vices and Virtues*), as explicitly stated by the author (page 287), arise from the awareness that several preparatory works are necessary before one can tackle a broader study of the topic, such as a monograph. In fact, the articles in this part, following the same method as the other section, start with the assumption of analysing, or rather defining, various Vedic words that will then

have an ethical significance in the future doctrine. This is the case for *sukṛtá* (and *duṣkṛtá*), *aghám*, *á́gas* and *énas*, *kárman*. And it is only once these terms have been defined that one can proceed with any kind of analysis or reflection. All these terms are always accompanied by references to texts, which are often cited in the articles. The overall idea that one can grasp in Bodewitz is that these Vedic terms already had a non-ritual significance in their early history (e.g., chapter 23). This point of view criticises not only Gonda's (1966) assumptions since he affirmed that these terms are only associated with the ritual, but also Tull's (1989) who stated that ethicization took place in the early Upaniṣads, without however explaining how the completely amoral Vedic ritual doctrine of *karman* developed into the ethical, non-ritual classical doctrine in the later Upaniṣads (Chapter 19, Bodewitz 1993). However, far more noteworthy is the idea, widely defended by the author, that one must start from the semantics of the target culture to correctly translate the terms of that culture. Furthermore, articles 22 and 23 present a systematic analysis, first, of vices and then of virtues and a comparison is made with Western and Christian culture. Indeed, another constant in the author's *modus operandi* is the presence of several articles where he provides a list and individual analysis of various related topics, such as vices and virtues or vedic words, which is useful in providing a systematic understanding of their meanings. Such articles thus allow both experts and non-experts a comprehensive and orderly view of the topics, a true starting point for subsequent and more in-depth studies.

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